THE GO AHEAD BOYS IN THE ISLAND CAMP

By ROSS KAY

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IN
THE ISLAND CAMP

BY

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PREFACE

Every one who loves outdoor life knows the charm and the pleasures of camping. To look back on the days passed in a tent by the shore of some forest lake or stream is a source of never-ending enjoyment to those of us who have had that experience. In this book I have tried to describe the adventures of four boys who spent a vacation camping in the Adirondacks, and who indulged in water sports of various kinds while there. Many of the episodes are true or at least founded on the experiences of former boys who enjoyed them. If the boys who may read this tale will derive some of the pleasure in hearing about them that the real boys did in participating in them I shall feel repaid.

Ross Kay.

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THE GO AHEAD BOYS IN THE ISLAND CAMP

CHAPTER I

MAKING CAMP

"HERE is the place to put the tent, String."

"I think this spot is better."

"Not at all. It's higher over here and consequently we won't be flooded by every rain that comes along and besides that, the flies won't be so apt to bother us."

"All right, just as you say."

The boy addressed as "String" had been named John Clemens by his parents. He was six feet three inches tall, however, and extremely thin so that the nickname applied to him seemed quite appropriate. At any rate his friends thought so and that was the name by which he usually was called.

Talking with him and arguing about the loca-

tion of the tent was Fred Button, a boy as short as John was tall. He was so small that the nicknames of Stub, Pewee and Pygmy had all been applied to him, the last one sometimes shortened to Pyg much to Fred's disgust. He had found out long ago, however, that there was no use in showing his irritation at this for it only served to increase the frequency with which the name was applied to him.

These two boys, together with two of their friends, were pitching camp preparatory to spending a summer on one of the Adirondack lakes. Grant Jones was one of these boys and the other was George Washington Sanders. Grant was the most serious-minded of the four and everything he did he did with all his heart. As a result he was a leader not only on the athletic field but in his studies as well. The other boys usually came to him for advice and looked up to him in many ways. The fact that he was of a serious nature, however, did not mean that he was not oftentimes just as full of fun as anybody.

George Washington Sanders having been named after the father of his country, had acquired the name of Pop. He was often in mischief and took especial delight in teasing his three friends. It

was almost out of the question to be angry at him, however, for he never lost his temper for more than a moment himself and was always bubbling over with spirits and fun. He was the life of any crowd he was in.

While the argument between John and Fred was in progress Grant and George approached.

"What are you two arguing about?" demanded Grant.

"We're trying to decide where to put the tent," replied Fred. "What have you two been doing all this time?"

"Putting the canoes away," said Grant. "Where are you going to locate the tent, anyway?"

"Well," said Fred, "John wants it over in that hollow, but I say it ought to be up on this little plateau."

"I think you're right, Fred," said George. "We won't get so many flies up there."

"Just what I said," exclaimed Fred triumphantly. "What do you think about it, Grant?"

"I think your place is better," said Grant. "Besides everything else we'll have a good view of the lake from there."

"All right," said John, pretending to be very

sad. "You all seem to be against me so I guess I'll have to give in."

"You see, String," exclaimed George with a sly twinkle in his eye, "we all know so very much more about this business than you do that you might just as well take our advice in everything."

"You talk too much, Pop," said John shortly, which remark drew a laugh of glee from George who had tried to irritate his friend and was delighted at having succeeded.

"I say we all stop talking and get to work on the tent," said Grant. "We can do all the fooling we want later."

"Great idea, Grant," exclaimed George, who was in excellent spirits at the prospect of all the good times ahead of them. "You're a wonder."

"You were right when you said Pop talked too much, String," laughed Grant. "We'll put him to work now, though."

In an incredibly short time the white tent was erected on the little bluff overlooking the lake. It was spacious with plenty of room for the four young campers and all their equipment, which was speedily stored away inside.

"How about a few fish for dinner?" exclaimed

George, when the tent was in place. "Personally I think they'd taste pretty good."

"Go ahead and catch some, then," urged John. "I'll help you eat them."

"Oh, I didn't worry about your not helping me out in that way," laughed George. "That's the least of my troubles. What bothers me is who is to clean the fish."

"The man who catches them always cleans them," said Fred.

"Oh, no, he doesn't," laughed George. "Not in this case, anyway."

"How about the cook doing it?" inquired John.

"As I am to do the cooking all summer I can't say I approve of that plan," laughed Grant. "That seems a little bit too much."

"Well, he hasn't caught any fish yet, anyway," said Fred. "Let him do that first and we'll argue about them afterwards."

"Where are you going to fish, Pop?" asked Grant.

"I thought I'd try it off those rocks down on the point there," said George. "That looks like a likely spot."

"While you're fishing I'll cut some balsam

boughs and make four beds in the tent," said John.

"And I'll get a place ready to make a fire in," said Grant. "That'll take a little time."

"How about you, Fred?" demanded George. "It looks as if you were about the only loafer in the whole crowd."

"I'll help String cut balsam."

"Very good," said George haughtily. "You may go now."

"I'll put you in the lake if you're not more careful," said John threateningly, but he laughed in spite of himself.

A few moments later every boy was busied with his appointed task. George, armed with his fishing rod, made off for the end of the little wooded island. John and Fred disappeared in search of balsam boughs, while Grant remained behind to make a fireplace. This was an interesting piece of work, the secret of which he had learned from a guide some few summers before during a sojourn in the woods.

First he selected eight or ten rocks as nearly the size and shape of cobblestones as he could find. These he placed on the ground in two parallel rows some twelve inches apart. Both little stone

walls thus formed he endeavored to make as nearly the same height as possible and before long his fireplace was complete. Between the two rows of stones the fire was to be made; pots and pans could thus be set over the fire and rest upon the rocks which formed the walls of the fireplace; in this way they could be kept from actual contact with the coals and at the same time most of the heat from the fire was concentrated upon them.

This is a very efficient method of making a camp-fire as Grant had learned from previous experience. Of course, in the case of a temporary camp or unless there are plenty of rocks close at hand, it is hardly worth while and it is not the kind of a fire that campers like to sit around in the evening. As a cooking fire, however, it is one of the best.

Grant had hardly finished this task when John and Fred returned to the camp. They were loaded down with balsam boughs and staggered under the weight of the loads they were carrying. With a sigh of relief each boy dropped his bundle on the ground and sat down to regain his breath.

"You fellows look as if you'd been working hard," laughed Grant.

"We have," panted John. "Just carry a load

like that for a while and see what you think of it."

"I'll take your word for it," said Grant. "Have you got all you want?"

"All the balsam, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Well, I should hope so," exclaimed Fred. "At any rate I refuse to go back after any more. My fingers are all gummy and sticky, too."

"The boughs smell great, though," said Grant admiringly.

"Don't they?" exclaimed John. "They'll be wonderful to sleep on."

"You see, Grant," remarked Fred, "String here is so tall we had to cut an extra supply to make a bed long enough for him. I'm really quite worried, too, for fear his feet may stick out beyond the flap of the tent, anyway."

"I'm not as bad as that I hope," laughed John. "It would be awful, wouldn't it, if I couldn't keep out of the rain?"

"You might stand on your head," suggested Fred. "Your feet sticking straight up in the air could take the place of umbrellas. They're big enough so that they'd shelter you, all right."

"Look here," exclaimed John, "that sounds like

one of Pop's remarks. I hope you're not getting as bad as he is."

"By the way," said Fred, "where is he? He ought to be back pretty soon."

"He's still fishing," said Grant. "I guess he hasn't had very good luck."

"He ought to have taken one of the canoes, anyway," said John. "He can't catch anything just standing on the shore."

"Oh, I don't know," said Grant. "He might get some small perch or bass."

"What I want is a good big trout," exclaimed Fred. "I'll consider this summer a failure unless I get one."

"Maybe we'll each get one," said Grant. "They say there are lots of them around here."

"Not so much in the lake as in the streams running into it, I guess," remarked John. "It seems to me that the big trout are always in small pools."

"Well, I'll try them all," said Fred eagerly. "I don't want just to catch trout; any one can do that. What I want is a big one."

"One you can take home stuffed, I suppose," suggested Grant.

"That's it exactly. I mean to have one, too."

"Well, we might fix up the beds first," said John. "It won't take long. All we want is four piles and we can spread the blankets out on them when we are ready to turn in. Just think of it; a nice soft sweet-smelling bed to sleep on and we won't feel any of the rocks and roots and bumps that may be under us."

"It sounds fine all right," laughed Grant. "We'd better get to work soon, too, for it'll be dark before long."

"I should think Pop would be back by now, too," said John. "You don't suppose anything could have happened to him, do you?"

"Why, I don't see how—" began Fred, when he suddenly ceased speaking and listened intently.

"What's the matter?" demanded Grant.

"Ssh," whispered Fred. "I thought I heard some one call."

CHAPTER II

A MISHAP

ALL three boys bent their heads and listened intently. The only sound that came to them, however, was the soft sighing of the breeze through the treetops and the occasional call of some bird preparing to settle down for the night. The sun was low in the west, just sinking below the fringe of the forest which skirted the little lake. All seemed quiet and serene.

"What did you think you heard, Fred?" demanded Grant after the lapse of several moments.

"I thought I heard a call. In fact I was almost—"

Once more he stopped suddenly and listened. "What was that?" he exclaimed.

"I heard something, too," whispered John excitedly. "Listen!"

"I don't hear a thing," muttered Grant. "I must be deaf."

"There it is again," cried Fred suddenly.

"I heard it, too," exclaimed John. "It came from that end of the island."

"That's the direction Pop took," said Grant in alarm. "Perhaps there has something happened to him."

"We'll soon find out anyway," cried Fred. "Come along!" and he began to run at top speed in the direction George had gone a short time before.

Close behind him followed Grant and John. Every boy was worried and beset with a thousand and one evil thoughts as to what might have befallen their light-hearted and well-loved comrade. Almost everything conceivable in the way of misfortune suggested itself to their anxious minds.

"Keep close to the shore, Fred," called Grant. "He was fishing, you know."

Fred did keep as close to the shore as possible, but it was no easy task a great many times. The island was rough and rocky and heavily wooded, the trees growing down to the water's edge in many places. Crashing through the underbrush and making a great deal of noise the three boys raced along. Whether or not the cry which John and Fred had heard was repeated they could not

say, for the tumult of their own mad course drowned out all other noises.

After what seemed a long time they came to the end of the island. Here the forest gave way to the rocks which ran out a considerable distance, forming a small peninsula. At the tip end were several big boulders which had become separated from the main island after long years of action by the water and in order to reach them it was necessary to jump across several feet from one to the other. Towards these boulders the three boys made their way.

"I don't see anybody," panted John.

"Nor I," agreed Fred. "I don't hear anything, either."

"Listen," warned Grant, holding up his hand.

"And look, too," murmured Fred under his breath.

Suddenly John started forward excitedly. "Look," he cried, "there he is."

"Where? Where?" demanded Grant.

"Down there in the water. Don't you see him?"

"Help! Help!" came the call, and John, Fred and Grant sped to the assistance of their comrade. His head showed above the water and he splashed

a great deal in an effort to remain afloat. That he was very rapidly becoming weaker, however, was plain to be seen.

"Give me a hand, somebody," cried George.

"All right, Pop. We'll be right with you," Grant reassured him.

George was struggling in the water close to one of the big boulders. Its sides were so steep and high, however, that he was unable to climb out. From his actions it also appeared as if he were keeping himself afloat merely with his hands.

"Get a stick, Grant," cried Fred. "You can hold it out for him to take hold of."

"Where is one? Find one, quick!" exclaimed Grant excitedly.

"Here you are," said John. "This one will do. Take this."

He held out a stick some six or eight feet long which had been lying on the shore at his feet. Grant seized it eagerly and hastened to George's assistance.

"Hurry up, Grant!" called George. "I can't last much longer!"

"Here you are!" cried Grant, leaning out from the shore as far as he dared and holding

the stick toward his friend. "Grab hold of this."

After one or two unsuccessful attempts George succeeded in catching hold of the stick. Grant drew him up as close to the rock as possible and then Fred and John bending down over the edge seized him by his arms and quickly pulled him out of the water and to safety.

"How did you happen to—" began Fred, when John suddenly interrupted him.

"What have you got around your legs?" he demanded in astonishment.

"My fishing line," said George, smiling weakly. "It tripped me up."

"Well, I should think it might," exclaimed John. "How in the world did you ever get it wound around you like that?"

"I had my rod in one hand," said George, "and I tried to jump from that rock over there to this one. I landed here all right, but when I jumped the line got twisted around my ankles and I lost my balance. It finally tripped me up and I fell into the water. When I got there the line kept getting more and more tangled up the harder I kicked, until finally I could hardly move my feet at all. I had to keep afloat just by using my hands."

"That was certainly a bright trick," exclaimed Fred. "Why, you might have drowned."

"I thought I was going to be," said George grimly. "I was getting pretty tired."

"Where's your rod?" inquired Fred.

"At the other end of the line. A steel rod doesn't float, you know."

"That's true," laughed Fred. "Haul in that line, John."

Of course all the line unrolled from the reel before the rod was rescued but it was finally brought safely to shore. A large section of the line, however, had to be sacrificed as it was found almost impossible to untangle the mass that had wound itself around George's legs and ankles, and a knife was necessary to free him.

"Where are your fish, Pop?" inquired Fred. "I suppose you dropped them all when you fell in," and he nudged Grant as he spoke.

"I had only one," replied George ruefully. "He did fall in and I lost him."

"What kind was it?"

"A black bass."

"A big one, I suppose."

"No, he wasn't either. He was pretty small. I didn't have any luck at all."

"You ought to have taken one of the canoes," said Grant. "You can't expect to catch anything from the shore."

"He'd probably upset the canoe," said Fred. "I don't think we should allow him to do anything alone after this."

"Huh!" was George's only reply to this sally.

"Feel like walking, Pop?" asked Grant. "If you do we'd better go back to camp and get some dry clothes for you."

"I was just thinking that," said George. "I'm commencing to feel chilly. These nights in the Adirondacks are pretty cool, I find."

"They certainly are," John agreed. "Let's go back."

"I could eat something, too," remarked Fred. "The cool air also seems to give you an appetite."

"Come on," cried Grant, and a moment later the four young campers were retracing their steps to the tent.

Arriving there, George made haste to change his wet garments for some dry ones. Fred and John collected wood for the fire while Grant made ready to cook the dinner. A short time later the odor of sizzling bacon filled the air, lending an even keener edge to four appetites that were sharp

already. The first meal in camp was voted a great success by every member of the party, and all agreed that Grant was a wonderful cook.

"Isn't this great!" exclaimed George, when the dishes had all been washed.

The four young friends were seated around a camp-fire crowned by a great birch log that blazed so brightly it lighted up everything for a considerable distance round about them.

"It surely is," agreed John. "I don't see how you could beat this."

"Just think of it," said Fred. "We're here for all summer, too."

"Oh, the summer will go fast enough. Don't worry about that," Grant warned him. "It'll be over before we know it."

At last the fire burned low until it was nothing but a mass of glowing embers. John arose to his feet and yawned. "I'm going in and try those new beds we made this afternon," he said. "I'm tired."

"I'm sleepy, too," exclaimed Grant. "Let's all turn in."

The few remaining coals from the fire were carefully scattered so that they could do no damage during the night. These four friends had had

enough experience in the woods to know what a forest fire means. They also knew that all good woodsmen were careful about such things and always had regard for the rights of others.

Every one was sleepy and it was not long before four tired and happy boys were stretched upon four sweet-smelling balsam beds, sound asleep. How long he slept John could not tell when he suddenly awoke with the feeling that he had heard a cry for help.

CHAPTER III

JOHN HEARS SOMETHING

JOHN sat upright and peered about him in the darkness, every nerve alert. He heard nothing, however. Perhaps he had been mistaken after all. George's mishap that afternoon had been on his mind and probably he had dreamed of it.

Somehow the feeling that he had heard a cry still seemed very distinct, however, and it gave him a most unpleasant sensation. He listened intently. He could hear the deep and steady breathing of his three comrades lying asleep around him, and he heaved a sigh of relief. At least nothing had happened to them.

Not a sound came to break the silence of the night and John began to feel sure that he had been deceived. He prepared himself to lie down again and go to sleep. He must have had a nightmare, he thought. Who could be in trouble on a calm, still night like this? At any rate it was none of their party and undoubtedly was no one

at all. It had all been a dream, though a most unpleasant one, and John shivered unconsciously at the recollection. His nerves had all been set on edge, but gradually he quieted down and once more settled himself to rest.

Barely had he closed his eyes, however, when the cry was repeated. There was no mistaking it this time, and John instantly was wide awake once more, the cold shivers dancing up and down his spine. Never had he heard such a voice. Some one evidently was in terrible distress mingled with fear with which hopelessness seemed combined. The voice trailed off in a wail of despair that brought John's heart up into his mouth.

It seemed to him that the cry must have awakened his companions as well, but no, he could still hear their regular breathing even above the violent pounding of his heart. What should he do? There was no question about it this time; it had not been a dream. Some one was in trouble and needed help, and evidently needed it badly. Consequently it was needed quickly, too, and John was determined to do his best.

He leaned over in the darkness and felt for the boy who was lying next to him.

"Grant," he whispered. "Grant, wake up."

Grant merely groaned and stirred uneasily.

"Wake up, Grant," he repeated, shaking his friend by his shoulder. "Wake up, I tell you."

"What do you want?" demanded Grant sleepily. "What's the matter?"

"Matter enough," exclaimed John. "There's somebody in trouble out here on the lake and he's calling for help."

"Is that so?" cried Grant, now wide awake. "Are you sure?"

"I heard him call twice."

"Was it a man?"

"I think so. I never heard such a voice. It was awful."

"We'd better go see what we can do then," exclaimed Grant. "Which direction did the voice come from?"

"I couldn't say; it seemed to come from all over. Oh, Grant, it was awful."

"Sure you didn't dream it?"

"Positive. I know I heard it."

"Come along then," said Grant. "We'll go outside and get one of the canoes and see what we can find. Maybe we'll hear it again."

"I don't know; it sounded to me as though it

was the death cry of some one. I never heard such a thing in all my life."

"Get your sweater and some trousers," directed Grant. "Don't wake Fred and Pop yet. We'll see what we can do first."

John and Grant rose carefully to their feet and laid aside their blankets. Feeling their way, they soon located their clothes and a moment later, partly dressed, they stepped forth from the tent. The night was clear, and the moon, in its last quarter, lighted up the trees and the water in a ghostly manner.

"Are the paddles—" began Grant, when the cry was repeated. This time it seemed only a short distance from their camp and out on the lake. Perhaps some one had upset a boat and was struggling in the water.

"There it is," cried John, clutching Grant excitedly by the arm. "Did you hear that? Isn't that terrible?"

"Is that what you heard before?" demanded Grant.

"Yes, the same voice. Hurry! We mustn't waste a second."

"Wait a minute, String," and in Grant's voice was the suggestion of a laugh.

"What's the matter?"

"Well, if that's what you heard the other times, I wouldn't be in a great hurry if I were you."

"Why not? Are you crazy, Grant? Can't you tell by that voice that some one is in trouble? Aren't you going to help him?"

"Did you ask me if I was crazy?"

"I did, and I think you are, too. Please hurry, Grant."

"Oh, no, I'm not crazy," said Grant, and there was no mistaking the fact that he was laughing now. "I'm not crazy, but you're loony."

"What do you mean?"

"That's a loon you hear out there."

"A loon," exclaimed John in amazement. "What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about a bird. That noise you hear is made by a bird named a loon. Haven't you ever heard one before?"

"Never. I don't see how a bird could sound so like a human being."

"That's what it is just the same," said Grant, and he was almost doubled up with laughter now. "I think I'd better wake up Pop and Fred and tell them about your friend that's calling for help."

"Are you positive it's a loon?"

"Absolutely."

"Then don't ever tell a soul," begged John eagerly. "I'd never hear the last of it as long as I lived. It would be awful if George ever knew."

"You're not the first one who's ever been fooled," laughed Grant. "You probably won't be the last, either."

"Please don't tell on me, though, Grant. Promise me you won't."

"We'll see," said Grant evasively. "I can't make any promises though."

"How should I know that it was a loon?" demanded John. "I never heard one before and you yourself say that other people have been fooled the same way."

"That's true. Still it's almost too good a joke on you to keep."

"What is a loon, anyway?"

"It's a bird; it belongs to the duck family, I guess. They live around on lakes and ponds like this and spend their nights waking people up and scaring them."

"I should say they did," exclaimed John with a shudder. "I never heard such a lonesome-sounding, terrible wail in all my life."

"There it is again," said Grant laughingly, as

once more the cry of the loon came to their ears across the dark waters of the little lake.

"Let's go back to sleep," exclaimed John earnestly. "That sound makes my blood run cold, even though I know it is made by a bird."

"Don't you think we ought to tell Fred and Pop about it?" inquired Grant mischievously. "It seems to me they ought to be warned."

"You can tell them about it if you don't mention my name in connection with it," said John. "If you tell on me though, I swear I'll get even with you if it takes me a year."

"All right," laughed Grant, "I won't say anything about it. At least, not yet," he added under his breath.

"What did you say?" demanded John, not having caught the last sentence.

"I said, 'let's go to bed.' "

"That suits me," exclaimed John, and a few moments later they had once more crawled quietly over their sleeping comrades and again rolled in their blankets, were sound asleep.

The sun had not been up very long before the camp was astir. Sleepy-eyed the boys emerged from the tent, blinking in the light of the new day. A moment later, however, four white bodies were

splashing and swimming around in the cool waters of the lake, and all the cobwebs of sleep were soon brushed away.

"That's what makes you feel fine," exclaimed George when they had all come out and were dressing preparatory to eating breakfast. "A swim like that makes me feel as if I could lick my weight in wildcats."

"You must have slept pretty well last night, Pop," remarked Grant.

"I did. Never slept harder in my life."

"Well, I didn't," exclaimed Fred. "It seemed to me I was dreaming all night long. Maybe my bed wasn't fixed just right."

"What did you dream about, Fred?" asked Grant curiously.

"Oh, all sorts of things. I thought I heard people calling for help. That seemed to be my principal dream for some reason."

"That's funny," said Grant. "You didn't dream anything like that, did you, String?"

"No, I didn't," said John shortly.

CHAPTER IV

SETTING SAIL

"WHAT shall we do to-day?" exclaimed George when breakfast was over.

"We might go fishing," suggested Fred. "I want a big trout some time this summer, you know."

"Oh, it's too sunny for trout to-day," Grant objected.

"All right then," said Fred. "What do you want to do?"

"How about taking a sail?"

"Is there enough wind?"

"Of course there is, and unless I'm very much mistaken its going to get stronger all the time."

"Suppose we take our lunch along," said John. "We can be gone as long as we want then and can go ashore and eat wherever we happen to be."

"Good idea, String," cried George heartily. "I do believe you're getting smarter every day."

"What do you think of my scheme?" demanded John, completely ignoring his friend's sarcasm.

"It's all right," said Grant. "I'm in favor of doing it."

"We can take a couple of rods with us, can't we?" said Fred. "We might get a few fish for dinner."

"That's right," agreed Grant. "We can anchor and fish from the boat if we want."

"Let's get started," exclaimed John.

A small catboat was a part of the equipment the boys had in order to help them enjoy their summer more thoroughly. It now lay at anchor in a little cove a short distance from the place where the tent was located. It was a natural harbor and afforded excellent shelter for the boats from the squalls and not infrequent storms that were apt to spring up during this season of the year. The lake was between two and three miles in length so that a comparatively heavy sea could be stirred up by the winds.

The island on which the four boys had pitched their tent was the only one in the lake and it was very nearly in the center. It was owned by a friend of John's father who had obtained permission for his son and his three friends to camp on it that summer. The sailboat and two canoes were included with the island, so that there was no ques-

tion but that these four boys were very fortunate indeed to be able to enjoy it all.

For months they had been looking forward to this summer and they had planned innumerable excursions and expeditions as part of their camping experiences. Now that the time was really at hand they meant to enjoy every minute of it to the utmost.

"Fred and I will get the boat ready," exclaimed John. "You two can collect the rods and fix up the lunch."

"Put me near the food and I'm satisfied," said George. "Come on, Grant."

John and Fred made their way down to the spot where the canoes were hauled up on the shore. The catboat lay moored at anchor some fifty or sixty feet out from the bank so that it was necessary to paddle to reach her. One of the canoes was selected and the two boys soon pushed off from shore.

"That's a pretty good looking boat I should say," remarked Fred as he glanced approvingly at the little white catboat. "I wonder if she's fast."

"She looks so," said John.

"You can't always tell by the looks though, you know."

"That's true too. We ought to be able to tell pretty soon though."

"I wonder if they have water sports or anything like that up here in the summer," said Fred. "If they do it would be fun to enter."

"It certainly would," agreed John. "I don't believe there are enough people on this lake though. As far as I can see we are about the only people here."

"I thought you said there was another camp down at the north end of the lake."

"That's right, there is. I don't know who's in it though."

"We might sail down and find out."

"Let's do that; it won't take long."

They had now arrived alongside the catboat, which was named the *Balsam,* and after having made fast the canoe, they quickly climbed on board.

"Any water in her?" exclaimed John.

"I don't know. I was just going to look."

"Lift up the flooring there and you can tell. It must have rained since she's been out here and we'll probably have to use the pump."

"We certainly shall," said Fred, who had raised up the flooring according to John's suggestion. "Where is the pump anyway?"

"Up there under the deck. You can pump while I get the cover off the sail here and get things in shape a little, or would you rather have me pump?"

"No, I'll do it. If I get tired, I'll let you know."

It did not take long to bail out the boat, however, and before many moments had elapsed the mainsail was hoisted and the *Balsam* was ready to weigh her anchor and start. The sail flapped idly in the breeze which seemed to be dying down instead of freshening as Grant had predicted. The boom swung back and forth, the pulleys rattling violently as the sheet dragged them first to one side and then the other.

John and Fred sat on the bottom of the boat and waited for their companions to appear with the luncheon. The two boys were dressed in bathing jerseys and white duck trousers. At least they had formerly been white, but constant contact with boats and rocks had colored them considerably. The feet of the young campers were bare, they having removed the moccasins which they usually wore. The day was warm and in fact the sun was quite hot. The previous night had been so cool it did not seem possible that it could be fol-

lowed by a warm day, but such is often the case in the Adirondacks.

"Where do you suppose they are?" exclaimed Fred at length. "It seems to me they ought to have been ready by this time."

"Here they come now," said John. "Look at Pop; that basket is almost as heavy as he is."

"He's got lots of food in it, I guess. I'm glad too for I'm hungry already."

"Why, you finished breakfast only about an hour ago."

"I can't help that. I'm always hungry in this place."

"Ahoy there!" shouted George from the shore. "Come in and get us."

"The other canoe doesn't leak you know," replied John, neither he nor Fred making any move to do as George had asked.

"We know that," called George. "What's the use of taking them both out there though?"

"Why not?" demanded John. "The exercise will do you good."

"Are you coming after us?" asked Grant.

"Not that we know," laughed Fred.

"I guess we paddle ourselves then, Pop," said Grant to his companion.

"All right," agreed George. "I'll get square with them though."

"How are you going to do it?"

"You let me paddle and I'll show you."

They spoke in a low tone of voice so that their friends on board the *Balsam* could not hear them and in silence they embarked upon the second canoe. Grant sat in the bow while George wielded the paddle in the stern. They approached the catboat rapidly where John and Fred sat waiting for them with broad grins upon their faces.

"You must think we run a ferry," exclaimed Fred as the canoe drew near.

"Not at all," said Grant. "We just thought that perhaps you'd be glad to do a good turn for us."

"We're tired," grinned John. "Think how hard we had to work to get the sail up and to pump out—"

"Oh, look at that water bug," cried George suddenly, striking at some object in the water with his paddle. Whether he hit or even saw any bug or not will always remain a mystery. One thing is sure, however, and that is, that a great sheet of water shot up from under the blade of the pad-

dle and completely drenched both John and Fred.

"What are you trying to do?" demanded Fred angrily.

"He did that on purpose," exclaimed John. "Soak him, Fred."

"Look out," cried George, "you'll get the lunch all wet."

"You meant to wet us," Fred insisted.

"Why, Fred," said George innocently; "I just tried to hit that water bug. How should I know that you would be splashed?"

"Huh," snorted John. "Just look at me."

"That's too bad," said George with a perfectly straight face. "If you had come in after us we'd have all been in the same canoe and you probably wouldn't have gotten wet."

"You admit you did it on purpose then?"

"I don't at all. I just thought perhaps it was some sort of punishment inflicted on you for being so lazy."

"Didn't he do it on purpose, Grant?" demanded Fred.

"I don't know," replied Grant, striving desperately to keep from smiling. "I know he didn't tell me he was going to do it."

"Well, it was just like him anyway," said John.

"He knew we couldn't splash him back because he had the lunch in the canoe with him."

"Take it, will you?" asked Grant, holding the basket up to John. "Here are the fishing rods too."

George and Grant followed soon after and the second canoe was made fast to one of the thwarts of the other.

"I'll put the lunch up here," said Fred, at the same time depositing the basket up forward under the protection of the deck.

"Slide the rods in there too, will you?" exclaimed George. "Look out for the reels that they don't get caught under anything."

"Everything ready?" asked John.

"Let 'er go," cried George enthusiastically. "I'm ready."

"Come and help me pull up the anchor then," said John.

"I'm your man," cried George. "You know I'm always looking for work."

"I've noticed that," laughed Grant. "You're always looking for work so that you'll know what places to keep away from."

Four light hearted young campers were now on board the *Balsam*. In spite of their words a few

moments before not one of them had lost his temper. They knew each other too well and were far too sensible not to be able to take a joke. Outsiders, listening to their conversation, might have thought them angry at times, but such was never the case.

"Get your back in it there," shouted Grant gayly to John and George who were busily engaged in hauling in the anchor chain. George stood close to the bow with John directly behind him as hand-over-hand they pulled in the wet, cold chain.

"This deck is getting slippery," exclaimed George. "All this water that has splashed up here from the chain has made it so I can scarcely keep my feet."

"I should say so," agreed John earnestly and as he spoke one foot slid out from beneath him. He lurched heavily against his companion, and George thrown completely off his balance, waved his arms violently about his head in an effort to save himself, but all to no avail. He fell backward and striking the water with a great splash disappeared from sight.

CHAPTER V

THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS

"MAN overboard!" shouted Grant, running forward as he called. He did not know whether to laugh or to be worried. One thing was certain though and that was that George like his three companions was perfectly at home in the water. All four were expert swimmers so that barring accidents they had little to fear from falling overboard.

"He's all right," cried John. "Help me hold this anchor, somebody."

Grant grasped the chain and one more heave was sufficient to bring the anchor up on the deck of the *Balsam*. Before this could be done, however, George came to the surface choking and spluttering.

"I'll fix you for that, String," he gasped, shaking his fist at John.

"For what?" demanded John.

"You know all right."

"Why, Pop," said John reprovingly.

"Keep her up into the wind, Fred," shouted Grant who was seated at the tiller. "Let your sheet run. Here, Pop, give me your hand."

"I'd better go down to the stern and get aboard there," said George. "I think it will be a little easier."

"All right; go ahead."

George floated alongside the *Balsam* until he came to the stern and a moment later had swung himself on board the boat. He was drenched to the skin but laughing in spite of himself.

"Do you want to change your clothes, Pop?" asked Grant.

"No, it's hot to-day. They'll dry out in no time."

"Ease her off then, Fred," Grant directed. "We may as well get started."

Fred put the helm over, the sail filled and the *Balsam* began to slip through the water at a good rate. The four boys sat around the tiny cockpit, Fred at the tiller and Grant tending sheet. In a few moments they had emerged from the little harbor and had entered upon the open waters of the lake.

"Well, String," observed George who was

busily engaged in wringing water from the bottoms of his duck trousers, "you certainly did it well."

"Did what well?" demanded John.

"Don't pretend you don't know."

"What are you talking about?"

"You meant to shove me overboard and I know it so there's no use in you trying to bluff. You were very skillful about it and I guess you got square with me all right. We'll call it even and quit."

"I did do it pretty well, didn't I?" grinned John.

"Yes, you did, but I think the way I soaked you and Fred was just as good."

"You didn't see a water bug then?"

"No, and you didn't slip either."

"Yes, I did; on purpose though. Let's call it off now."

"I'm agreeable," laughed George, "even if you did get the better of me."

"How about me?" demanded Fred. "Pop wet me just as much as he did String and I don't see that I am even with him yet."

"You 'tend to your sailing," laughed George. "That'll have to satisfy you."

"I can steer you on a rock you know," warned Fred.

"Don't do it though," begged Grant. "I'm an innocent party and I'd suffer just as much as the others."

"Where shall we sail?" asked George.

"Fred and I thought we might go down to the other end of the lake," said John. "There's a camp down there, I believe, and we might see who is in it."

"Go ahead," exclaimed George. "Meanwhile I think I'll try to get my clothes dry," and suiting the action to the word he divested himself of everything he had on, which was not much. The few articles of clothing thus taken off he spread flat on the deck of the boat so that they might get the full benefit of the sun's rays.

The day was bright and not a cloud appeared in the sky. A gentle breeze blew across the lake barely ruffling the water. Consequently the *Balsam* sailed on an even keel and scant attention was necessary to keep her pointing in the right direction.

"How about trolling?" exclaimed Fred all at once.

"What do you mean by that?" asked George.

"You mean to say you don't know what trolling is?"

"If I had I wouldn't have asked you, would I?" laughed George.

"Well, I'll tell you," said Fred. "Trolling is fishing in a certain way. When you troll you sit in a moving boat and trail your line out behind you. As a rule you use a spoon or live bait so that it gives the appearance of swimming. People usually fish for pickerel that way."

"Let's try it," cried George enthusiastically. "Who's got a spoon?"

"I have," said Grant. "Hold this sheet and I'll put it on my line."

"Any pickerel in this lake, I wonder," remarked John.

"There ought to be lots of them," said Fred.

"Bass and perch too, I guess," John added.

"Perch are fine eating," exclaimed George. "I've eaten them cooked in a frying pan with lots of butter and bacon," and he sighed blissfully at the recollection.

"Did you ever eat brook trout fried in bacon and rolled in corn meal?" asked Fred.

"Not yet," laughed George. "I hope to before long, though."

"Well when you do you'll know you've tasted the finest thing in the world there is to eat," said Fred with great conviction.

"Is it better than musk melon?"

"A thousand times."

"Whew!" whistled George. "Is it better than turkey?"

"A million times."

"Say," exclaimed George. "Is it better than ice cream?"

"It's better than anything, I tell you," Fred insisted.

"I'll take your word for it," laughed George. "I'd like to try it myself pretty soon though."

"Here's your spoon," said Grant, holding out the rod to George.

"You're going to fish, yourself," said George firmly.

"Not at all. I got it for you."

"Why should I try it any more than you?"

"Because I want you to. Go ahead."

"If you insist, I suppose I'll have to," laughed George and dropping the spoon overboard he let the line run out.

"How much line do I need?" he asked.

"Oh, about fifty or sixty feet I should think," said Grant.

"Well, I don't know much about it," remarked John breaking in on the conversation; "but it doesn't seem to me that we are making enough headway to keep that metal spoon from sinking."

"I'm afraid not myself," agreed Grant. "The wind seems to be dying down all the time and we'll be becalmed if we're not careful."

"I'll try it a few minutes anyway," said George. "I might get something."

"All you'll get is sunburned, I guess," laughed Fred. "You'd better put your clothes on or you'll be blistered to-morrow."

"That's right, Pop," said Grant. "I'd get dressed if I were you."

"Perhaps you're right," George agreed. "Here, String, you take the rod."

Scarcely had John taken the rod in his hands when he felt a violent tug at the line. The reel sang shrilly and then was still.

"You've hooked one," cried Fred excitedly. "Reel in as fast as you can."

"Bring the boat around, Fred," shouted Grant. "Come up into the wind."

Fred did as he was directed, while John strove

desperately to reel in his line. At first there was no resistance and then all at once the rod bent double.

"Say!" exclaimed George, "it must be a whale!"

"It's bottom," said John disgustedly. "The old spoon sank just as I said it would and I've caught a log."

"Don't break the line whatever you do," warned Grant. "Swish your rod back and forth."

"It's caught fast," said John, following Grant's directions.

"Keep it up, you'll get it loose yet."

Suddenly the hook was released and as John reeled in there was no resistance to be felt at all. A moment later the spoon appeared and pierced by the hook was a small chip of watersoaked wood showing that it was some sunken log that had deceived the boys at first.

"That trolling business is great all right, isn't it?" laughed George, now completely dressed once more and ready for anything.

"I'll take you out in one of the canoes some day and prove to you that it's all right," said Fred warmly. "You—"

He suddenly stopped speaking and looked up.

"I thought I felt a drop of rain," he remarked in surprise.

"You did," exclaimed Grant. "Just look there. Here comes a squall and we're in for it all right. This is no joke."

CHAPTER VI

ADRIFT

"QUICK, Fred!" cried Grant. "Bring her up into the wind. You help me let down this sail, Pop."

An angry gust of wind scudding across the lake, caught the catboat and made her heel far over.

"Let go your sheet, Fred!" shouted Grant. "Quick or we'll upset."

He and George sprang forward and feverishly tried to loosen the ropes that held the sail aloft. The wind was increasing in strength now, however, and the boat was becoming more difficult to manage every moment. The sky was inky black and sharp flashes of lightning cut the clouds from end to end. The thunder roared and echoed and reëchoed over the wooded mountains round about. It was now raining hard.

"Keep that sheet clear of everything," cried Grant, who usually assumed command in every crisis. "Let it run free whatever you do."

"You hurry with that sail," retorted Fred.

"They're doing their best I guess," said John.

"If they don't get it down soon we'll go over," cried Fried. "I can hardly hold her now."

"Can I help you, Grant?" asked John, striving to make his way forward. The boom, however, swung violently back and forth threatening to knock him overboard every second. It was almost impossible to keep out of its way in the tiny catboat.

"Go sit down," cried Grant. "We'll get it down in a second."

The rain now fell in torrents. The wind whistled and shrieked all about them and it seemed as if at any moment the sail must be torn to shreds and the mast ripped from its socket. Lucky it was that Fred was an experienced sailor and endowed with nerve as well. The squall drove the boat backwards but Fred managed to keep her nose pointed straight into the teeth of the gale. Otherwise the *Balsam* could not have lived two minutes.

"Why don't they hurry with that sail?" exclaimed Fred peevishly.

"They are hurrying," said John. "The ropes are wet and they're nervous."

"Ah, there it comes," cried Fred suddenly. "Now we'll stand a chance."

With a rush the sail came down, its folds almost completely covering the four boys in the boat. The strain on the tiller was greatly relieved however and the Balsam maintained a more even keel.

"Whew!" exclaimed George, groping his way astern. "What a storm this is!"

"I never saw it rain so hard," said John. "Just look; you can't see more than about ten feet."

"We'll go aground if we're not careful."

"How can we stop it?" demanded Fred. "We're at the mercy of the storm."

"Throw the anchor overboard," suggested George.

"A good idea, Pop," exclaimed Grant. "Come along and I'll help you."

"You'll get struck by lightning," warned Fred, half seriously. The flashes were blinding and almost continuous. The thunder ripped and roared all around and so near at hand was the center of the storm that sometimes the smell as of something burning could be detected in the air.

"That anchor will never hold us," said John who sat in the stern, huddled close to Fred. Grant and George were feeling their way forward.

"Don't throw the lunch basket over by mistake," called Fred.

"The lunch won't be worth much now, I'm afraid," said John ruefully.

"Oh, I don't know; it's under the deck."

"I know, but the boat has a lot of water in her now and if it touches that basket it will soon soak through."

"How deep is this lake?"

"I've no idea. I don't even know where we are."

"I'm afraid we're going to run ashore all of a sudden somewhere."

"The anchor ought to catch before that happens," said John. "It's trailing now you know."

"I know it is, but suppose we hit a lone rock."

"We're running that chance. I don't know what we can do about it."

"Are you trying to steer, Fred?" asked Grant who together with George had now crawled back to the stern of the boat.

"I'm trying to keep her headed with the waves; that's all I can do."

"I know it. I think the squall's letting up some though."

"Perhaps it is," agreed John. "It does seem a little bit lighter."

"It isn't raining so hard either," observed Grant. "These squalls stop just as quickly as they start sometimes."

"The lake must be deep here," said Fred. "How long is that anchor chain?"

"About fifteen feet I guess," said John.

"That ought to keep us from going ashore anyway," exclaimed Fred. "Who said this storm was over?"

"It must be coming back," said Grant. "It certainly let up for awhile though."

"But it's making up for it now all right," observed George. "I'm so glad I took all that trouble to get my clothes dry."

The four boys looked at one another and could not help laughing. Every one of them was drenched through to the skin and no one had a dry stitch of clothes on. The rain pelted them mercilessly and the water ran off their faces in streams. All huddled together, they made a forlorn looking party.

"This is what all campers get I suppose," remarked George.

"They certainly do," agreed Grant. "Some of them get it worse than this too."

"Do you suppose our tent is still there?" inquired John.

"Let's hope so," exclaimed George fervently. "We'd be in a nice fix if we found it blown away when we got back."

"If we do get back," said Fred dolefully.

"What's the matter with you, Fred?" demanded Grant. "You don't think we're all going to die or be killed, do you?"

"I don't know. This is a bad storm and we can't see where we are."

"But the anch—"

There was a sudden jolt. Every boy was almost thrown from his seat as the boat came to a quick stop. Then the bow swung slowly around and a moment later the *Balsam* was pointed straight into the wind, her anchor chain taut.

"We're aground," cried George.

"Not at all," corrected Grant. "The anchor chain has caught, that's all."

"Where are we?"

"I can't see."

"We must be somewhere near shore," said John.

"We might be on a shoal."

"No, there's land," cried John. "I can see it."

"Maybe it's on our island," said George. "Wouldn't that be queer."

"Well, I wish the old storm would be over so we can see just where we are located," exclaimed Fred. "I've had enough of this."

"You'd better be thankful the anchor holds and not worry about anything else," observed Grant. "So far we can't complain."

"It's stopping," said George suddenly. "The sun will be out in a minute."

"If it comes out it had better bring an umbrella, that's all I can say," observed John.

"A pretty poor joke, String," said George. "Try another one; it might be better."

"The sun is coming out," cried Grant. "The storm is almost over, I guess."

"Thank goodness!" exclaimed Fred. "Now we can see where we are."

Little by little the rain abated, the wind died down and the thunder melted away in the distance. Before many moments had passed the sun broke forth from behind a cloud and blue sky appeared.

"Do they have many of these squalls around

here, I wonder?" said George. "I don't think very highly of them myself."

"Nor I," agreed Grant. "Just look where it carried us."

"There's our island," exclaimed Fred. "I thought it was in the other direction though."

"So it was," said John. "We traveled the whole length of the lake, I guess."

"Right past our camp?"

"It looks so."

"Suppose we had hit one of those big rocks where I fell in," said George. "Our anchor wouldn't have done us very much good there."

"I should say not," agreed Grant. "Isn't that a camp over there?"

His three companions gazed in the direction he indicated and sure enough a big white tent very similar to their own appeared on shore, a short distance from the spot where the *Balsam* lay at anchor.

"I don't see anybody around," remarked Fred. "Do you suppose they're all away?"

"The best way to find out is to go and see for ourselves," exclaimed Grant.

"That's right," observed George. "Let's get the anchor up and sail in."

"There's a dock there too, where we can land," said Fred. "Perhaps the people who are camping here have been caught out in the storm."

"We'll soon know anyway," said Grant, making his way forward to assist George in getting up the anchor.

CHAPTER VII

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING

A FEW moments later the *Balsam* was making its way towards the tiny wharf in the little harbor. Two canoes lay bottom up on the shore but no sign of any living being appeared.

"Perhaps they've gone to the ball game," remarked George.

"Ball game!" exclaimed Fred. "What are you talking about?"

"I was just fooling and trying to get a rise out of somebody. Of course I knew I could make somebody bite with you on board."

"Huh," snorted Fred. "I thought you'd gone crazy, talking about ball games up here in the woods."

"You two are always wrangling," exclaimed Grant. "Stop it."

"I can't resist trying to get rises out of Fred," said George. "He's so easy."

"Leave him alone," said Grant. "I wonder where the people are who own this tent. There doesn't seem to be a soul around."

"Let's go up to the tent and peek in," suggested John.

"Do you think we ought to do that?" Fred protested.

"Why not? We're not going to steal anything are we?"

"I'm not," laughed Fred. "Of course I don't know about you."

"Come ahead," urged George. "We'll just take one look."

They made their way up from the dock towards the tent. Still no sign of life appeared and when John had stolen one hasty glance inside the tent he reported that no one was in there either.

"Let's go back," exclaimed Fred. "There's no use in staying around here any longer."

"Come on," said Grant. "It's time to eat too."

"We might eat our luncheon over on that point," suggested George, indicating a spot about a mile or so distant from the place where they were.

"Eating suits me all right," exclaimed John. "I must say I'm hungry."

"And I'd like to get my clothes dry," added Fred. "I'm sort of cold."

Once more they set sail on the *Balsam* without having caught sight of a single occupant of the camp they had just visited. The sun was now shining brightly and the sky was as blue as ever. No trace of the recent storm remained to mar the beautiful day. It was not long before all four boys were in excellent spirits again and their appetites became keener with each passing moment.

Landing on the point where they had decided to eat their luncheon, they quickly set about making preparations for the meal. A fire was soon started and with every one assisting, the meal was quickly under way.

"How soon will it be ready, Grant?" asked George of the cook.

"Oh, in half an hour."

"Come on then, String," exclaimed George. "Let's go back into the woods here and see if we can't find some berries or something."

"Don't get lost," warned Grant. "Fred and I are too hungry to spend a lot of time looking for you, you know."

"Don't worry about us," laughed John. "We'll be gone only a few minutes."

Leaving Grant and Fred busy with the cooking the two boys plunged into the woods and disappeared from view. The trees were still dripping from the heavy rain, but the fragrant odor of spruce and balsam was stronger than ever. The thick carpet of pine needles under their feet was wet, so that their advance was noiseless.

Suddenly, up from its hiding place almost under their feet, a grouse arose with a roar and whirr of wings. Booming off through the trees it quickly disappeared from view leaving the forest as silent as before. The spell of it was on the two young campers as they stood still and gazed all about them. The green leafy aisles of the woods stretched in all directions around them most beautiful and inviting to the eye. A catbird whined from a nearby tree, but otherwise all was still.

"Did you ever see anything more beautiful?" asked John in a low voice.

"I never did," replied George solemnly. The beauty and the grandeur of it all made them feel as though they really should not speak above a whisper.

"I don't see any berries though," continued John.

"Nor I," said George. "There's an open space

ahead of us though; perhaps we'll find some there."

"Some blueberries wouldn't taste bad just now."

In silence they continued their walk, even taking care to step softly so as not to disturb the solemnity of the woods. Ahead of them appeared a break in the trees and an open space showed. Here was the place to find blueberries if any grew in that neighborhood at all. A moment later the two boys came to the edge of the clearing which was perhaps a hundred yards square.

As they were about to step out from the shelter of the trees George suddenly clutched his companion by the arm.

"Look there," he whispered.

Following George's directions John saw something that caused his face to grow white and his heart to jump. In the center of the clearing and busily engaged in eating the blueberries which grew in abundance all about was a large black bear.

He seemed entirely oblivious to his surroundings and as the wind blew from him towards the two boys he was not aware of their presence. With one great paw he stripped the berries from the low-

lying bushes and with his long, eager tongue he licked them up greedily. That his ancient enemy, man, might be lurking nearby apparently did not occur to him. The two boys stood and watched him, fascinated, not knowing whether to run or whether to hold their ground. The bear was scarcely a hundred feet distant from the spot where they were standing.

"What shall we do?" whispered George.

"Wait."

"Suppose he comes after us."

"If he does we'll run."

All at once the bear looked up. Perhaps some eddying current of wind had betrayed the presence of the two boys to his sensitive nostrils. It is a well known fact that the eyesight of most wild animals is comparatively poor; their sense of smell, however, is correspondingly sharp and it is on this that they must rely to a large extent for safety.

All around him old bruin gazed while the hearts of the two young campers almost stood still. There they were standing within plain sight, right at the edge of the forest and they could not possibly escape being seen. Anxiety as to what the bear would do made the next few moments very nervous ones.

Suddenly he saw them. George and John held their breath and waited. He looked at them steadily for a moment, one paw held poised in the air. Then he turned and with that clumsy lumbering gait common to his kind ambled off across the clearing. Arriving at the opposite side he turned his head and glanced back at the two boys, still standing in the shadow of the trees. Then he continued his way once more and quickly disappeared from sight.

"Well," exclaimed George. "What do you think about that?"

"Suppose he'd chased us."

"He'd never have caught me," said George grimly. "With a bear after me I know I could at least equal the world's record for the half-mile."

"Even so, you'd have finished second," laughed John.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I'd have beaten you out, of course."

"Maybe so," said George laughingly. "At any rate I guess it would have been a pretty close finish. Imagine what Grant and Fred would have thought if they'd seen us coming, tearing out of the woods with a big black bear after us."

"I'd have gone right on across the lake too," said John.

"Do you want some berries?"

"It's pretty late now I'm afraid. I think perhaps we'd better go back."

"Perhaps so. Let's go anyway; we can come back here after luncheon."

"That bear might have the same idea."

"That's true too," admitted George. "We can bring Fred and Grant along with us if they want to come."

The two boys made their way back through the forest towards the lake. Knowing that there were such things as bears in the neighborhood they kept a sharp watch all about them. If they had only realized it, no bear was half as anxious to meet them as they were to meet a bear. Wild animals seldom if ever seek trouble of their own accord.

A few moments later George and John emerged from the woods and caught sight of the fire and their two companions.

"Hey, you two!" called Fred. "Where have you been?"

"Are we late?" asked John.

"I should say you were. Grant and I were just

about to eat up all the food and not save any for you at all."

"Thank goodness you didn't," exclaimed George, fervently.

"Did you find any berries?" demanded Grant.

"Lots of them. A good many of them are still on the bushes."

"Didn't you bring any back?"

"Not a single one."

"What do you think of that, Fred?" demanded Grant. "These fellows go back in the woods and stuff themselves with a lot of berries and don't even bring one back to the two who are working hard to prepare food for them."

"We didn't eat any ourselves."

"You didn't?" exclaimed Grant. "What was the matter with them; weren't they good?"

"I guess they were," said John. "We didn't try any though."

"What's the matter?" inquired Fred. "What are you two trying to say anyway? You found a lot of berries but you didn't bring any back and you didn't eat any yourself. What's the reason you didn't?"

"Somebody was there ahead of us," said George.

"The owner you mean?" asked Grant. "Wouldn't he give you any?"

"It wasn't the owner," said George. "It was somebody else."

"I wish you'd stop talking in riddles," exclaimed Grant impatiently. "Why don't you tell us what happened?"

"There was a bear there," said John. "He liked berries too."

"A bear!" cried Grant and Fred in one breath. "What do you mean?"

"There was a big black bear eating the blueberries," said George, "so we just decided we didn't care very much for berries ourselves."

"Tell us about it," demanded Grant eagerly.

"I can't talk unless I have something to eat first," replied George firmly.

"Nor I," agreed John.

"Come and eat then," laughed Fred. "We too have got something to tell you two when you've finished."

CHAPTER VIII

A PREDICAMENT

WHILE all four boys were doing full justice to the meal which Grant had prepared, George and John related the story of their meeting with the bear.

"And now," exclaimed John when he had finished, "you tell us what you have to say. Fred said there was something."

"We had an idea while you were gone, that's all," said Grant.

"Tell us what it was."

"Go ahead, Fred."

"No, you tell them," urged Fred.

"Well," said Grant, "it was only this. Fred and I were talking things over and we thought it might be good fun if we took the two canoes and went off on a little trip for a couple of days. What do you think about it?"

"I think it would be great," exclaimed John heartily. "How about you, Pop?"

"It suits me first rate," said George eagerly. "Why can't we start to-night?"

"That's a little soon I should think," laughed Grant. "We can go to-morrow though if you say so."

"We can get some good trout fishing up these streams, you know," said Fred. "I want to get that big trout."

"If there's any big trout caught I expect to be the one to do it," said George very pompously.

"Huh," snorted Fred disgustedly, "you couldn't catch cold."

"You just wait and see," muttered George under his breath.

"Do you know anything about trout fishing?" insisted Fred.

"I never did any in my life."

"And you expect to catch a big trout?" said Fred derisively. "Why, Pop, you're sort of out of your head, aren't you?"

"Wait and see," repeated George confidently.

"Do you know how hard it is to cast a trout fly when you're standing in the middle of a clump of bushes and the branches of trees are in your way all around you?" continued Fred. "Don't you know that it takes almost years of practice to do

it so that you are accurate and don't catch your hook on everything in sight?"

"Wait and see," insisted George. "I have a new system."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Fred. "You're a joke."

"Let's go back to camp and stop these two arguing," exclaimed Grant. "They're at it all day long."

"We like each other all the more because we do it, don't we, Pop?" demanded Fred laughingly.

"Yes," admitted George, "except that you're awfully conceited at times."

"Come on," urged Grant. "They'll be at it again if we're not careful."

Before many moments had passed the *Balsam* was once more sailing over the clear waters of the lake and in a short time the four boys arrived back at camp. The remainder of the day was spent in planning for the trip they were about to take and in discussing just where they should go. At length an agreement satisfactory to every one was reached, the arrangements were all completed and there was nothing left to do but wait for the morrow in order to start.

The sun had been up but a short time before the

camp was astir. Grant set about preparing breakfast while his three companions packed supplies into the two canoes. Food sufficient for three days was loaded on board; blankets were taken along, and trout rods with numerous flies of course were included.

"Breakfast's ready," announced Grant as soon as the work of loading was complete.

"So am I," exclaimed George heartily. "I'm always ready to eat up here."

"Not only 'up here' either," muttered Fred.

"What did you say?" demanded George, wheeling around so as to face the speaker.

"Nothing."

"As usual," laughed George. "Where's the food?"

"Right here," exclaimed Grant. "Let's see you get rid of it."

No second invitation was needed and it was not long before every crumb and morsel that Grant had prepared had disappeared.

"Let's get started," exclaimed George. "All the food is gone so there is no point in staying around here any longer."

"You're right, Pop," laughed John. "I say we go too."

A few moments later the two canoes emerged from the little harbor and started out across the lake, headed northward. Grant and Fred occupied one of them while George and John paddled the other.

"I'm glad you're not in my canoe, Fred," called George gayly. "Small as you are, I'd soon get tired of paddling you around all day."

"Is that so?" snorted Fred. "Well, you're not half as glad as I am for I know that I'd be the one that would have to do all the work and you're too big and fat to make the work pleasant."

"They're at it again, String," laughed Grant. "What shall we do with them?"

"Leave them home," suggested John.

"Oh, we couldn't do that. They'd be like the Kilkenny cats."

"Who were they?" demanded Fred.

"Didn't you ever hear about them?"

"No. Tell me who they were."

"I guess you mean *what* they were."

"All right, what they were, then."

"Why," said Grant, "they were a couple of cats that loved to fight. One day somebody tied their tails together and hung them over a clothes line. Of course they began to fight right away and they

fought so furiously that when it was all over there wasn't a thing left of either of them."

"I suppose you expect me to believe that story," snorted Fred.

"I don't care whether you believe it or not," laughed Grant. "You wanted to hear it, so I told it to you."

"Grant says we're like a couple of cats, Pop," called Fred.

"Tell him he'd better be careful," replied George. "Just because we call each other names doesn't mean that we allow other people to do it."

"Excuse me for interrupting," said John laughingly, "but does any one know where we are going?"

"I do," replied Grant. "We're going up that river you see straight ahead."

"Do you know where that leads to?" inquired Fred.

"Yes. We can paddle up it for about two miles and then we have to make a carry over to another river."

"How long is the carry?" demanded George.

"Oh, about half a mile, I guess."

"Whew!" exclaimed George; "that's a long dis-

tance to carry canoes and all the stuff we have in them."

"Getting ready to shirk already, are you?" demanded Fred teasingly.

"Shirk nothing," said George. "Wait and see if I don't do my share."

"Yes and 'wait and see' if you don't catch the biggest trout too," taunted Fred. "Why, Pop, you'll be lucky if you catch your breath."

"Wait and see," muttered George darkly.

"Yes, 'wait and see'," echoed Fred. "If you don't stop saying that we'll have to call you, 'Wait and See.'"

Just at this moment, however, they came to the mouth of the river and the argument was abandoned, for the time being at least.

"This is great!" exclaimed John. "I always did like paddling in a narrow space rather than on a lake or some place like that."

"I do too," agreed Grant. "You feel closer to things somehow."

"You're no closer to the water, you know," remarked George with a wink at Fred.

"Don't pay any attention to him, Grant," said John. "I think we ought to throw both of them overboard anyway."

As they progressed, the stream became narrower and the current swifter. Evidently they would be unable to paddle very much farther upstream and the young campers began to keep a sharp lookout for the carry.

"There it is," exclaimed Fred, suddenly pointing to a small sandy beach a short distance ahead of them.

They soon landed and emptying the canoes, they started off through the woods to transfer them to the next river. It was necessary to leave the baggage behind to await their coming back for it. Two boys to each canoe they set out, the light boats turned upside down and bearing them aloft on their shoulders. In spite of many groanings from George they reached their destination before much time had elapsed, and then resting the canoes on the bank of the stream they returned for the baggage. This was more quickly and more easily transferred so that a short time later they were once more making their way by paddling.

"Say, Grant," exclaimed John when they had covered a few hundred yards, "how do you know all about these rivers?"

"Didn't you see that map I have?"

"No. I kept wondering how you knew so much

about the country around here. I didn't know you had a map."

"Of course I have. I wouldn't know anything any other way for I've never been up here in my life before."

"String thought you guessed at it," laughed George.

"No, I didn't at all," protested John. "I just didn't think about it."

"Does your map say that there are rapids ahead?" asked Fred.

"I didn't notice. Why?"

"Because I think there are. It seems to me that the current is getting swifter all the time and I think you'll find that when we go around that bend up yonder you'll find rapids ahead of us."

"Shall we run them?" demanded George excitedly.

"We'll probably be wrecked if we try it," said Grant.

"We can see how bad they are, anyway," John suggested.

"Yes," agreed Fred. "We'll 'wait and see.'"

"'Go ahead' is my motto when rapids are concerned," said George.

Rounding the curve in the river they discovered

that scarcely a hundred yards farther was another bend in the stream. Meanwhile the current was rapidly becoming swifter and stronger.

"We can't see yet," exclaimed George. "We'll have to go ahead."

All four boys were excited now, and there was an eager light in every one's eyes as they were carried along by the swiftly-flowing stream.

Suddenly they came around the second bend, and spread out before their eyes appeared a long stretch of white water. It foamed and danced, here and there broken by a huge rock, black and ugly looking.

"We can't run those," cried Grant. "We'll drown sure."

"Go ashore then," shouted Fred, and he drove his paddle desperately into the water. John and George also fought valiantly to divert their course and avoid the rapids. Too late, however, for the current was stronger than they, and with ever increasing speed they were drawn swiftly towards the foaming waters below.

CHAPTER IX

DANGER

"WORK, Fred! Work!" urged Grant desperately.

"I'm doing my best," panted Fred, and from the way he drove his paddle into the water it was evident that what he said was true.

They made a little progress towards the shore. They moved still more swiftly downstream, however, for the current was powerful here. For every foot that they progressed towards shore they were drawn a yard closer to the rapids. Unless they reached the bank very soon they were certain to be forced to run the rapids whether they desired to or not.

George and John in the other canoe were in the same predicament. The two frail little craft seemed no stronger than shells and it was almost unbelievable that they could traverse that foaming stretch of water in safety. No one spoke now;

every boy was too busily employed in the desperate struggle he was waging against the river.

The current eddied and swirled. From below came the roar of the water as it raced along in its mad course. Beside them was the shore and safety; below was danger, accident, and possible death.

When the two canoes had rounded the bend in the river the one which John and George occupied had been a trifle closer to shore. Consequently it had just that much advantage over the other. The occupants of the two canoes were too engrossed in their own struggles to take much notice of their companions, but out of the corner of his eye Grant saw that the other canoe had nearly reached its goal.

A moment later he heard a call from the shore sounding above the roar of the rapids below. It was George's voice.

"Keep it up, Grant!" he shouted. "You'll make it yet."

"Stick to it, Fred!" cried Grant, encouraged by the knowledge that their companions had reached safety. "We can make it."

"I'm sticking to it all right," replied Fred grimly.

Closer and closer to shore they came. Nearer and nearer sounded the noise of the rapids. Could they win out? Certainly they could if nerve and determination were to count for anything.

Ahead of them Grant could see George frantically urging them on. He was so excited that he had run down into the water, where he stood knee-deep, begging and imploring his comrades to come to him. Inch by inch they seemed to move towards shore. Their muscles were aching from the strain now and it was agony for both boys to keep up the fight, but neither one gave even the slightest thought to quitting.

It almost seemed as if they were going to win out now. George was scarcely ten feet distant; arms outstretched he eagerly awaited a chance to seize the bow of the canoe and draw it and its occupants to safety. His chance did not come, however.

Just out of his eager reach a whirlpool caught the canoe. The bow swung suddenly around and Fred's paddle was almost wrested from his grasp. In vain he and Grant fought. Twice the frail little boat spun around and then seized by a sudden eddy in the current was borne swiftly and relentlessly towards the rapids below.

"We're goners!" cried Fred.

"Keep your nerve!" shouted Grant fiercely. "You do the steering from the bow. You can see the rocks from there."

At racehorse speed the canoe shot forward. With every second its momentum increased until it seemed fairly to fly over the water. White-lipped and with jaws set the two boys sat and awaited their fate. From the shore George and John watched with feverish anxiety.

Now they were almost in the rapids. An eddy caught the canoe and it nearly upset. It escaped, however, and again sped on. Around it the water foamed white and hissed and snarled as it raced along. Black rocks stood out along the treacherous pathway. It seemed as if the canoe must surely come to grief on any one of a dozen of them.

Seated on the bottom of the canoe and with his eyes riveted on the rapids below, Fred wielded his paddle like a madman. First one side and then the other he dipped it, changing so swiftly sometimes as almost to bewilder the onlookers.

They were half way through the dangerous passage now. Was it possible that they could come through those angry waters untouched? It was out of the question; they had merely been lucky

so far. At least that was the way George and John felt about it. Any moment they expected to see their comrades upset and disappear from sight beneath those terrible foaming waves.

Still the canoe raced on. One moment it had the speed of a locomotive and the next, caught by some eddying whirlpool, its momentum almost ceased, only to shoot forward suddenly again at a bewildering pace an instant later.

"I believe they'll get through," exclaimed George excitedly. He and John were standing on a large boulder which afforded them an excellent view of the rapids.

"Wait," cautioned John quietly.

" 'Wait and see,' " smiled George.

"Please don't joke," muttered John. "I don't feel like it."

The onrushing canoe was almost through the rapids now. Could it be that two inexperienced boys were to come through that mad mill race alive? If they could last a moment more they were safe, but ahead of them was the most dangerous part of the rapids. Two huge rocks stood out in midstream scarcely six feet apart. Between them the water rushed and roared like a cataract. Below this spot the rapids ended and the cur-

rent gradually slowed down to its normal swiftness.

Fred and Grant saw all this in the twinkling of an eye and they knew that the test was now to come. Both boys braced themselves; so swiftly did they move now that it almost seemed as if they were standing still and that it was the two great rocks that were charging down upon them. Closer and closer they came. With bated breath George and John watched from the shore, realizing their companions' peril.

Fred, in the bow of the canoe, gripped his paddle with all his strength. One moment more and their lot would be decided. The rocks looked like mountains as they bore down upon them. Now they were just ahead, ugly and bristling in their might; now they were alongside; now they were past. Fred and Grant had run the rapids in safety. They could scarcely realize it. The danger was over and they were alive.

"Yea, Fred!" shouted Grant. "We're through!"

"Thank goodness," sighed Fred, and he sank back limply against one of the thwarts of the canoe.

"You're a wonder," cried Grant.

"It's a wonder we're alive, you mean."

"That's true, too. But the way you steered!"

"It wasn't due to any skill on my part; we were just lucky."

"Anyway," exclaimed Grant happily, "we ran the rapids and I wouldn't give up that experience for a million dollars now."

"Neither would I, *now,*" agreed Fred. "It would take a good deal more than that to make me go through with it again, though."

They had now reached a point two or three hundred yards below the rapids and decided to go ashore and wait for John and George. It was with a very comfortable feeling that the two boys set their feet on solid ground once more.

"Just look back there and see what we came through," exclaimed Grant.

"I don't see how we did it," said Fred. "I wonder if we really did."

"You think you were dreaming, I suppose," laughed Grant. "I can swear we did do it, though, and I guess Pop and String will, too."

"It doesn't seem possible."

"Here we are."

"I know it. Just look at those rapids, though. They look like Niagara Falls from here."

"There ought to be good fishing along here," remarked Grant.

"I should think so. Perhaps Pop can catch his big trout here. The big fellows usually stay in the deep pools below rapids like this."

"Here they come now," exclaimed Grant, as John and George appeared, carrying their canoe along the shore.

"We'll have some fun with them about it, anyway," said Fred, in a low voice. "Watch me get a rise out of them."

"Hey, you two," shouted George, as he spied his friends. "What do you mean by scaring String and me almost out of our wits?"

"Do you suppose we did it on purpose?" laughed Grant.

"Why, that was nothing at all for us," said Fred, airily.

"Oh, is that so?" demanded George, mimicking Fred's tone. "Well, if that was nothing, I'd hate to see what something was."

"That was no effort at all for us," continued Fred, carelessly.

"Put this canoe down quickly, String," exclaimed George. "Let me get at that fellow. He ought to be drowned."

With a sigh of relief John and George deposited their burden on the ground and George immediately advanced threateningly towards Fred.

"Let him alone, Pop," laughed Grant. "He's the best steersman this side of the Canadian border."

"He was pretty good, wasn't he?" exclaimed John. "How did you two fellows like shooting the rapids?"

"It was wonderful," said Fred heartily. "I never had such a wonderful sensation in all my life."

"I'll bet you were both almost scared to death," said George, shortly.

"We were," laughed Fred, "but now that it's all over we're glad we did it."

"Fred thinks there ought to be some good fishing in these pools along here," said Grant. "What do you say to trying them?"

"That suits me," said George readily. "I'm hungry, too."

"We'll have lunch right here then," exclaimed Grant, "and afterwards we'll try our hands at the trout fishing."

"And Pop will catch the biggest trout that ever

swam in the waters of the Adirondacks," added Fred, nudging John as he spoke.

"Huh," exclaimed George disgustedly. "I wish you'd stop that talk. I suppose you'll be worse than ever now that you've run these rapids."

"I didn't say anything about myself," smiled Fred. "I was talking about the big trout you were going to catch."

"I suppose you think you're the only one here who can shoot rapids or catch fish or do anything at all."

"I told you I was talking about you, not about myself," insisted Fred. "I said you'd probably catch the biggest trout in the Adirondacks."

"You think you're pretty funny," snorted George. "You just wait and see."

CHAPTER X

WAIT AND SEE

WHEN luncheon was over, the four young campers busied themselves with preparations for the afternoon's fishing. They sat around on the bank joining the different sections of their trout rods and selecting the flies which they considered would be most tempting to the speckled fish they sought to catch.

"We'll fish from the shore, I suppose," remarked John.

"Of course," exclaimed Fred. "The current is too strong here to try it from a canoe."

"I'm not much good at this game, I'm afraid," laughed John. "I don't expect to catch a thing."

"I don't know anything about it, either," said George, "but I certainly expect to catch something just the same."

"Maybe you'll have beginner's luck," said Grant.

"I don't care what it is," laughed George. "I want some fish, though."

"Well, I'm ready," said Fred, rising to his feet. "Where are we going?"

"Suppose two of us go upstream and two down," suggested Grant.

"All right," exclaimed Fred. "You and I will go up and the others the other way. We'll meet back here in time for supper."

"At the latest," added John.

Fred stepped to the shore and deftly cast his fly out on the waters. Gradually lengthening the amount of line he had out, he kept casting and then drawing the rod back over his head so that the line stretched far behind him. Then, with a short snap of his wrist he would send the fly floating out over the pool again. As it came to rest lightly on the surface of the water he jerked it along for a few feet in imitation of the struggles of a live insect and then he would repeat the performance all over again.

His three friends watched him with absorbing interest.

"That's a simple performance," exclaimed George at length. "Why don't you leave the fly in the water for a second or two and give the fish half a chance to swallow it? It would have to be an awfully quick trout to take your hook."

"They're quick enough; don't worry about that," smiled Fred.

"But why don't you let the hook sink a little below the surface?"

"Did you ever see a moth or a bug of some sort light on the water?" Fred inquired.

"Yes. Lots of times."

"Did you ever see one sink?"

"No, I don't believe I ever did," George admitted slowly.

"That's just it," exclaimed Fred triumphantly. "If a real insect doesn't do it, why should an artificial one? The idea is to make the fly appear just as much alive as possible."

"I haven't seen you catch anything yet," remarked George.

Hardly had he spoken, however, when Fred had a strike. His fly had settled like thistledown on the surface of the pool after an almost perfect cast, when there was a rush and the line was drawn swiftly across the pool. The light rod bent almost double and Fred's three companions jumped to their feet excitedly.

"Yea, Fred!" shouted John. "You've hooked a big one. Stick to him."

"Big one nothing," said Fred shortly. "It's a little fellow."

"Bring him in anyway," cried George. "The little ones are just as good to eat as any kind."

The trout may have been small as Fred had predicted, but he put up a valiant fight. After a very pretty struggle, however, he was gradually brought in close to the bank, and with a quick, dexterous scoop of his landing net Fred brought him to shore.

"About ten inches," he remarked as he held the gamey little fish up for his friends to see. "He was fierce, though; look there," and he showed the side of the trout's mouth all torn and bloody, so hard had he attacked the hook.

"Let's go after some ourselves, String," exclaimed George eagerly. "I'd rather catch them myself than to watch others."

"Remember you're going to get a big one," reminded Fred.

"Wait and see," said George gruffly.

Without wasting any more time he and John made their way downstream while Fred and Grant worked slowly in the opposite direction. Fred was the only one of the four who was at all skill-

ful in handling a trout-rod, and, as a consequence, he had the best luck at the start. Grant, however, had captured one prize, and to his delight it proved to be larger than any Fred had caught.

They had progressed slowly towards the rapids, stopping at every pool for a few casts, but both boys seemed to have the idea that their luck would be better farther up. Consequently they did not linger long in any one spot until they reached a point just below the rapids. Here there were several large pools, and each boy selected one and prepared to make a cast.

Grant had experienced considerable difficulty in making his casts, for the branches of the nearby trees and bushes seemed far easier to locate than the spot for which he aimed. Time and again he had found his hook entangled by the overhanging limb of some tree and he had spent many moments in freeing it as a result. It was particularly exasperating to him as he saw Fred with apparent ease drop his fly on any spot he cared to hit.

Grant had just succeeded in disentangling his hook for at least the tenth time when he heard his name called.

"Come over here, Grant!" shouted Fred excitedly. "I need help."

Grant immediately dropped his rod and started towards the spot where Fred was standing.

"What's the matter?" he demanded, when he was only a few yards distant from his companion.

"Matter?" exclaimed Fred. "Look at that rod."

It was bent almost double, and the line whipped back and forth across the pool as if it was possessed.

"Zowie!" cried Grant eagerly. "You've hooked a good one this time."

"I should say I had."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Take that landing net and stand ready to scoop him up in case I can bring him close enough to shore, and don't lose him beforehand."

"Don't lose him," begged Grant. "Look at him go."

The light rod was almost in the shape of a horseshoe and it scarcely seemed possible that it could stand the strain. Back and forth and around and across the pool the trout carried the hook. Fred strove to keep a constant pressure on the line in order to tire the fish out; he did not try to check his frequent bold rushes, however, but rather to prevent the line from becoming slack at any time.

One moment he would reel the line in swiftly and there would be almost no resistance at all; the next moment, however, just as he and Grant had come to the conclusion that the struggle was practically ended, off would go the line again while the reel sang loudly.

Fred was white-lipped, he was so excited. But who wouldn't be, for there is no more thrilling sport in the world than to fight a big trout with a five-ounce rod?

"I believe he's tiring," exclaimed Fred at length.

"A little, perhaps," agreed Fred.

"I wish he'd jump so we could see him."

"If he does I'll lose him. That's one of the things I'm doing my best to prevent."

"Why so?" demanded Grant in surprise.

"If a fish can jump clear of the water he can very often shake the hook out of his mouth. I've seen it happen too often."

"But I don't see how you can prevent it."

"If I keep a steady strain on him all the time, he can't jump. It's only when the line is slack that they have a chance to do that."

"Look at him go!" exclaimed Grant.

"Wouldn't you think he'd be getting tired by this time?"

"He is. His rushes aren't as long as they were before."

"Does that mean you've got him?"

"Not at all. You've never caught a trout until he is safely on the shore."

Fred had not once taken his eyes from the line while he was talking with Grant. Carefully, coolly and with great skill he played his fish. Never once did he relax his caution, and little by little he seemed to be gaining the mastery. Every rush was shorter than the one before, and after every one he reeled in a bit more of line and brought the trout a trifle nearer to the shore and the net.

"Get ready, Grant," said Fred in a tense voice.

The handle of the net in his right hand, Grant knelt on the rocks on the edge of the pool. He was just to the left of the spot where his comrade was standing and he now watched the line just as closely as Fred.

"Let me know when to scoop him," he said.

"You'll know all right," replied Fred. "You'll see him in the water."

"You tell me, though."

"All right."

The plucky trout was tiring rapidly now. His struggles became weaker and weaker. Fred had played him well, but he was too seasoned a fisherman to feel that the fight was ended. Bitter experience had taught him that there is many a slip.

"Get the net ready," exclaimed Fred after what seemed like a very long time to Grant, who was not comfortable in the position he was in.

Nearer and nearer Fred brought the trout. He still struggled weakly but was practically exhausted now. Relentlessly Fred reeled in the line. Once the trout broke the water with his tail not a dozen feet from shore and Grant held his breath; he thought the fish had escaped.

Not so, however, for a moment later he could see him in the water being drawn remorselessly closer to the net. Grant was in a panic for fear he should not do his part correctly.

"Now, Grant!" cried Fred suddenly.

The trout was in the water almost at Grant's feet. His struggles were very weak now and thanks to the way Fred handled the rod, was nearly motionless. Carefully Grant lowered the net into the water and moved it along until it was

almost underneath the beaten fish; then with a quick motion he raised the net and a moment later the trout lay upon the bank enmeshed in its folds.

"Nice work, Grant!" exclaimed Fred. "You did that like a veteran!"

"Isn't he a beauty!" cried Grant delightedly.

"He surely is."

"How much do you suppose he weighs?"

"Oh, I don't know. I'd hate to say; two pounds and a half, I guess."

"That's pretty big, isn't it?" inquired Grant.

"It is for this part of the country and it's all I'd care to tackle with a five-ounce rod."

Fred had removed the hook from the fish's mouth now and he held him up to view.

"He's all right," said Grant admiringly.

"What do you suppose Pop will say about him?" grinned Fred. "I don't believe he can match him, do you?"

"I don't know," said Grant doubtfully. "I'd hate to bet on it. You can't ever be sure what he'll do."

"Huh," laughed Fred derisively. "He couldn't catch a trout like that to save his life."

"Wait and see," cautioned Grant.

CHAPTER XI

WHAT GEORGE DID

"WELL, I suppose we might as well go back now," said Fred. "It'll be dark before long."

"All right," agreed Grant, reluctantly. "I wish I might have caught a trout like that one of yours though."

"I'll stay if you want to."

"No, I guess not," said Grant. "As you say it will be dark soon and we might as well go back."

"Get your rod then and we'll start."

Grant returned to the spot where he had been standing when Fred called him, and picking up his rod soon joined his companion. Together they made their way back to camp rehearsing the story of the big trout's capture time and again during the journey.

"The others don't seem to have returned yet," remarked Grant when they had arrived at their destination. "Shall we wait for them?"

"I don't see the use. Let's clean some of the fish and get ready for supper."

"You're not going to eat that big one, are you?"

"I'm not going to touch it yet, that's sure. I want to show it to Pop first."

"Aren't you going to stuff it and take it home?"

"I don't believe I can," said Fred. "I don't know how to do it myself and there isn't any place around here where I can have it done."

"That's too bad; still it will make good eating."

"After I've shown it to Pop," grinned Fred.

"Here they come now!" exclaimed Grant, and as he spoke John and George appeared through the trees a short distance away.

"What luck did you have?" demanded John as he and his comrade approached the fire which Grant had started.

"Pretty good," replied Grant. "I caught only one myself but Fred got eight."

"Good for him," exclaimed John. "Did you get any big ones?"

"Fred caught one beauty."

"Let's see it."

Nothing loath Fred proudly produced his big trout and held it up for the inspection of his friends.

"Say," exclaimed George, "that's a good one all right!"

"He certainly put up a game fight too," said Grant. "You should have seen it."

"I wish we had," said George. "None of the ones we caught gave us any trouble at all."

"Perhaps you didn't catch any big enough," said Fred, preparing to tease George and remind him of his boasts. "How many did you get anyway?"

"Only four all together," replied George. "String caught three of those."

He and John seemed unwilling for some reason to talk very much and they had the appearance of holding something back. Perhaps if it had been lighter it would have been possible to see a guilty look on the faces of both boys.

"Let's see your fish," urged Fred. "Don't be afraid of them. I'm surprised that you didn't catch more than one, Pop. I expected that you'd bring in at least a dozen and that you'd surely get one bigger than mine; here you are with only four little ones between you. Bring them out anyway."

John opened the creel and dipping his hand in-

side brought out a trout about ten inches long and laid it on the mossy bank.

"That'll do for a start," grinned Fred, who was thoroughly enjoying himself. He knew that he had made good his boast about catching a larger fish than George. He had been somewhat worried up to the present time for as Grant had said it was never possible to say just what George would do. Now, however, all doubts had been swept from his mind and he was perfectly confident that he had beaten his rival.

"There's another," said John, bringing out a second fish, if anything a trifle smaller than the first.

"Huh," laughed Fred, "I'll bet that's the one Pop caught."

"No, it isn't," said John. "I caught those two and this one too," and he placed a third trout by the side of the other two. All three of them were almost exactly the same size.

"They're not very large, are they?" said John dubiously.

"Oh, they'll make fine eating," exclaimed Fred. "Where's your other fish though? I want to see the one that Pop caught."

John once more put his hand in the creel and felt all around.

"I don't feel it here," he said anxiously.

"Maybe it slipped through a crack in the basket," said Fred gleefully. "Are you sure you caught a fish, Pop?"

"Why, I thought so," said George. "Here, String, let me try to find it."

"Too bad we haven't got a magnifying glass," chuckled Fred as John passed the creel over to George. "You know it's against the law to catch the little bits of ones anyway."

"Find it, Pop?" inquired John.

"Here it is," exclaimed George after a moment's search and he drew forth to the astonished gaze of Grant and Fred a trout that one glance showed was easily larger than the one Fred had caught.

"Where'd you get that fish?" demanded Fred in amazement.

"I caught it."

"You did? How'd you do it?"

"With a hook and line of course. I told you to 'wait and see.'"

"Well," gasped Fred, and he stopped for lack of anything further to say. His three companions,

however, burst into gales of laughter all at his expense and all seemed to enjoy the situation very much.

"Let me see him," demanded Fred, and George very willingly handed over his prize to be inspected.

"Why, look here," exclaimed Fred. "There's not a cut or a mark of any kind around his mouth but his stomach has a big gash in it."

"Certainly," said George. "That's where I hooked him."

"In the stomach?" cried Fred. "What are you talking about?"

"Tell him how you did it, Pop," urged John gleefully.

"Well," said George, "it was like this. I tried to fish the way I saw Fred doing it but I couldn't to save my life. The old hook kept catching on everything in sight."

"Just like mine," interposed Grant.

"I finally got disgusted," continued George. "It didn't seem to be any use in my trying any longer and I thought that a trout would be an awful fool to bite that silly looking fly anyway. I've always fished with worms and I didn't see why I couldn't catch trout with worms for bait. I de-

cided to try it anyway, so I rolled over an old log and dug under it with my knife. It wasn't long before I had a couple of big fat fellows and I soon put one on the hook and took the fly off.

"Well, I fished with the worms for a while but nothing happened and I began to get pretty well discouraged. I quit fishing and lay down on my stomach to get a drink out of one of the pools. The water was just as clear as crystal and just as I lay down I saw a big old trout shoot under a big rock at the bottom of the pool. That proved there were trout in there anyway.

"The rock where he disappeared was right beneath me and I picked up my line with the big worm still on the hook and let it down just as quietly as I could until it was right in front of the rock. Nothing happened for a long time and I thought the trout was gone, but all of a sudden I saw him again."

"Were you holding the line in your hand?" inquired Grant.

"Yes; it was just like a drop line. The rod was lying in back of me on the ground and all I had done was to let out a lot of line. Well, the old trout sort of poked his nose out and took a look around. He went up to the worm and took a smell

of it; at least that's the way it looked. He didn't bite it though and a second later he went whizzing back underneath the rock again. I thought he was gone for good but in a few seconds back he came; the worm seemed to attract him even if he didn't try to eat it. He kept hanging around it all the time, sort of sniffing at it first one side and then the other.

"All of a sudden I had an idea."

"Whew," whistled Fred softly.

"I decided," continued George paying no attention to the interruption, "that I'd try to pull the line up all of a sudden and hook him in the stomach. I didn't see why such a thing wasn't possible and I meant to try it the first chance I had. Old Mr. Trout still hung around the worm but it seemed as if he was never going to get right over the hook. Finally he started to swim away slowly and I thought it was all over. He only went a few feet though and then turned back. The worm seemed to fascinate him.

"He went right up to the hook and sort of looked it over again; then he turned his back on it so to speak, and kept perfectly still, just wiggling his fins. I lowered the hook a little and he never moved. I lowered it a little more and held it there.

All at once he turned leisurely around and came right square over the hook. I yanked the line with all my might and there he is."

George pointed proudly to the big trout lying at his feet.

"That's a great way to fish for trout," exclaimed Fred in disgust.

"That's all right, Pop," laughed Grant. "You caught him anyway, didn't you?"

"I surely did. I told Fred I'd beat him out and I did it. Why, Fred, you little shrimp, I'd have put salt on his tail and caught him that way if it was necessary in order to take some of the conceit out of you."

"Bah!" exclaimed Fred in disgust.

CHAPTER XII

A CHALLENGE

TWO more days the boys spent among the streams and the trout pools. At the end of that time their supply of food was running low and they decided to return to their island camp.

The return trip was made without any mishap and when they entered the little lake where their island was situated, their tent, standing out prominently on the little bluff where it was pitched, was a welcome sight to all.

"It looks pretty good, doesn't it?" exclaimed John proudly.

"It certainly does," agreed Fred. "I'm sort of glad to be back again."

"We had a great time though," said George enthusiastically. "There's one more trip I want to take this summer too."

"What's that?" inquired Fred.

"I'd like to climb that mountain over there."

The four young campers turned their heads and gazed at the peak George indicated, towering high over the lake.

"That's a go," exclaimed Grant readily. "I think that it would be good fun."

"So do I," agreed John. "Let's do it soon too."

"Do you suppose it will be very hard work?" asked Fred.

"Of course it will," said George. "You wouldn't let that hold you back though, would you?"

"Not at all, but I don't want you fellows to get the idea that it will be any easy job. The mountain looks nice and green and smooth from here because it's all covered with trees, but when we get there we'll find it's pretty rough going. Ravines and gullies and steep cliffs and everything else like that will be there to hold us back."

"All the better," exclaimed George. "Then when we reach the top we'll feel as if we had accomplished something."

"We'll do it anyway," said Grant and every one else agreed with him.

Soon they reached their destination. The *Balsam* still rode at anchor in the little harbor and

everything seemed to be as the boys had left it. In a few moments the canoes had been drawn up on shore and their contents unloaded. Grant in the lead, they made their way towards the tent.

He disappeared inside the tent and before his companions had come up with him, reappeared holding a paper in his hand.

"What have you got there?" inquired George curiously.

"I don't know. I found it inside the tent."

"See what it is," exclaimed George.

"It's a challenge of some kind, I think," said Grant after a hasty glance at the sheet which he held.

"A challenge?" exclaimed John. "Not for a fight, I hope."

"Not as bad as that," laughed Grant. "It's an athletic challenge."

"Who from?" demanded Fred.

"I don't know yet," said Grant. "Give me a chance."

"Read it out loud," urged John. "That's the best way."

"We, the undersigned," read Grant, "hereby challenge the four boys who are camping on the

island in the middle of the lake to a set of water sports. The events are to be decided upon by mutual agreement and are to be as many in number as may be agreed upon. We suggest that they include a sailing race, a canoe race, and a swimming race. The day for the sports is to be decided later and on Monday morning we will come over to see you and arrange the details.

Signed, THOMAS ADAMS.
FRANKLIN DUNBAR.
HUGH MCNEALE.
HERBERT HALSEY."

"Who are they, do you suppose?" exclaimed John.

"I don't know," said Fred. "I never heard of any of them before."

"They probably live in that camp down at the other end of the lake," said Grant. "The one we visited the other day, you know."

"And found nobody there," added George.

"That's it. They must be the ones."

"I guess they are," agreed John. "How do they know so much about us though? I don't see how they knew there were four of us."

"Probably they've seen us around," suggested

Grant. "That part of it is easy enough."

"Well, what do you think of the challenge?" demanded Fred.

"I say we accept it," exclaimed George eagerly.

"Of course we will," said Grant. "I think it will be great sport."

"They may be a good deal older and bigger than we are," suggested Fred. "If they are we'll sort of be outclassed."

"I don't believe they are," said Grant. "At any rate I don't think we'll be outclassed."

"We'll give them a good rub anyway," exclaimed George. "What sort of sailing and swimming and canoe races do you suppose they mean?"

"They had a catboat like the *Balsam*," said John. "Don't you remember seeing it down by their tent? We'll use the catboats for the sailing race."

"A relay swimming race would be a good stunt," suggested Fred. "In that way we could all be in it."

"When they come over here we can decide all the details," said George. "When was it that they said they were coming?"

"Monday, I think," said John. "Wasn't it, Grant?"

"Yes. That's day after to-morrow."

"We ought to have some judges," said Fred.

"That's true," agreed Grant. "I don't know where we'll get any though."

"Maybe they'll know somebody," suggested George.

"We'll find out all about it on Monday anyway," said Fred. "Let's have a little food now. I'll faint unless I eat pretty soon."

"Poor little Freddy," laughed George. "You need a nurse."

"Huh," snorted Fred. "Ever since you hooked that trout by the tail you have been too fresh to live. Your turn will come though."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded George.

"Why, that the freshness will be taken out of you one of these days."

"Who'll do it?"

"I don't know, but I have a sure feeling that something will happen to you unless you mend your ways."

"Stop your arguing, you two," exclaimed Grant. "You fight all day long."

"We're not fighting," laughed Fred. "That's

just the way we show how fond we are of each other."

"Well, I must say you have a queer way of doing it," said Grant. "I'd hate to see what you'd do if you didn't like each other."

"Such a thing could never happen, could it, Fred?" demanded George.

"No, I guess not. I don't know what I'd do if I didn't have some one like you around to make fun of," responded Fred.

"Who caught the big trout?" taunted George.

"Will you keep quiet about that fish?" exclaimed Fred. "All you do is talk about it from morning till night. I never want to hear of it again."

"You will though," grinned George.

"Oh, I know that, but I wish something would happen to keep you quiet."

Such a thing was destined to come about before Fred dreamed it would and it was also something he never would have thought of, possibly.

"I need some wood for this fire," remarked Grant, who was busied with preparations for dinner. The sun was fast sinking in the west and the light was commencing to fade. A lone king-

fisher winged his way across the lake returning to his home, a hole dug in some bank overlooking the water. All was quiet and peaceful.

"I need some wood for this fire," Grant repeated, for no one had paid any attention to his former statement of this fact.

"You hear that, Pop?" inquired Fred. "Grant needs some wood."

"Yes, I heard him," replied George. "What's the matter with you; your legs haven't turned to stone, have they? Can't you get it?"

"I can, but I have to wash the dishes to-night. It seems to me that that's just about enough for me to do."

"All right," sighed George, "I'll get it. It strikes me, though, that I do about all the work around here that there is to be done."

"Yes, it's too bad about you," jeered Fred. "Take the ax and get out of here."

"It's pretty dark," said George as ax in hand he started for the clump of trees in the rear of the tent. It was growing dark as George had said and it was becoming more and more difficult to pick out the narrow trail. He had advanced but a short distance when a little animal ran out into the path and trotted along ahead of him.

"Why, look at the cat," exclaimed George half out loud. "I wonder how it got on the island here."

As he spoke the little black and white animal left the path and entered a clump of bushes on one side. George had always been extremely fond of pets of all sort and he followed eagerly.

"Here puss, puss, puss," he called. "Here kitty, kitty, kitty."

There was no response and he called again. He used his most enticing manner and did his best to coax the little animal out again.

"Wouldn't they be surprised back at camp," he thought, "if I should bring in a cat? It would make a fine mascot for us too."

He bent over the bushes where the cat had disappeared and called again; no response came, however. He bent the twigs aside and stepped in, looking carefully all about him as he went forward. Suddenly he uttered a cry of surprise and started back. He thought he was choking, and springing back into the narrow pathway he turned and ran for the tent as fast as his legs would carry him.

CHAPTER XIII

THE OUTCAST

GEORGE'S one idea was to run away, but the remarkable part of the adventure was that it seemed to be impossible to shake off that from which he was trying to escape.

A moment later he arrived at camp and spying his three friends seated around the fire he made his way towards them. As soon as he reached the spot where they were he threw himself upon the ground and commenced to moan and groan violently.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear," he cried. "What have I done? What have I done?"

"Why, Pop!" exclaimed Grant in alarm. "What's the matter with—"

He broke off suddenly in the midst of the sentence and looked at George in horror. All sympathy for the sufferer quickly left him.

"Get out of here!" he cried, but not waiting for George to leave he departed quickly himself. He

was accompanied by Fred and John who seemed to be stricken with some strange malady, a mixture of anguish and laughter.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" cried George as he saw his three friends leaving him.

"Do anything you want," called Fred. "Drown yourself if you like, but don't come near me."

"Where'd you get it, Pop?" shouted John gleefully. "You'd better go soak in the lake for a couple of days."

"Get away from that fire," cried Grant. "Our supper is being cooked there and we can't come back until you leave."

"I'm not stopping you," replied George. "Come back and tell me what to do."

"I told you," exclaimed Fred. "Go and drown yourself."

"Where'd you get it, Pop?" repeated John and immediately went off into gales of laughter.

"You caught the trout all right," laughed Fred. "You caught something else. Something a good deal bigger than that fish too."

"Isn't it awful!" exclaimed John holding on to his nose. "I remember my younger brother once ran across a skunk like this and he had to live in the barn for two days."

"To think that Pop should be the one, too," said Fred delightedly. "It seems almost too good to be true."

"It's true all right enough," said Grant grimly. "Go up close to him if you don't believe it."

"What shall I do?" called George to his three unsympathetic companions. He was standing near the fire, anguish depicted on his face. He was in a sorry plight, for no matter where he went he could not escape the almost overpowering odor that clung to him.

"Take all your clothes off and throw them in the lake," said Grant. "Then go take a swim yourself."

"After that we might let you come back," added Fred.

"But I can't throw away perfectly good clothes," protested George.

"They're not 'good' any more," laughed John. "Throw them away."

"Burn them if you like," suggested Fred. "Do anything you want with them, only get rid of that smell. You can't come near us until you do."

"Is that so?" demanded George and he took a few steps forward. "Who says I can't come near you?"

"Don't do it, Pop, don't do it," begged Grant. "If you only knew how you smelled."

"I do know; don't worry about that. It follows me wherever I go."

"Please don't come near us," exclaimed Grant as George still moved towards them.

"I thought I'd come over and hug Fred," said George. "He's so pleased about it all that it seems only fair that I should share the smell with him."

"You stay away!" cried Fred in alarm. "Don't you touch me. Don't come within forty rods of any of us."

"Oh, Fred," grinned George mischievously, "don't run away from me. I just want to show you how fond of you I am."

As he spoke George walked slowly towards the group of three boys who stood and watched him anxiously. They knew that George would stop at nothing once he was started and his offer to share the smell of the skunk with Fred gave them ample cause for alarm. Fred was the one most worried and he really had good reason for his alarm, for he knew that George would like nothing better than to rub up against him and inflict the awful odor on him too.

"You keep away from me, Pop!" cried Fred uneasily.

"Don't you like me?" grinned George.

"Oh, yes, I love you," exclaimed Fred, knowing well that whatever he might say it would be exactly the wrong thing.

"Then let me hug you," urged George, advancing steadily nearer.

"I'll hit you over the head with this rock."

"Why, Fred, how unkind of you; I really am surprised."

"You'll be worse than that if you don't keep away," warned Fred, but he backed away a few feet as he saw George steadily approaching.

"Let's get out of here," whispered John to Grant and unnoticed by George they withdrew and made their way back to the fire.

"Pop certainly has Fred worried now all right," laughed John.

"I should say so," agreed Grant. "The joke was on Pop at first but it certainly is on Fred now. Just look at them."

George still advanced slowly towards the spot where Fred was standing. He held his arms out, entreating Fred to come to him, but Fred very evidently had no intention of doing any such thing.

He was slowly retreating, threatening George meanwhile with all manner of punishment if he was not left alone.

"Come to me, Fred," begged George, a wide smile on his face. He was content to suffer the discomfort of the terrible odor himself as long as he could worry his friend so effectively.

"Keep away from me, I say!" threatened Fred, brandishing a stick in his right hand. "I swear I'll hit you over the head with this if you don't."

"Oh, Fred, you wouldn't do that, would you?" exclaimed George, pretending great surprise. "You wouldn't hit your old friend who only wants to share something nice with you. You can't be serious."

"You heard what I said."

"But Fred—"

"Whew, what a smell!" cried Fred suddenly and he turned and fled as fast as his legs could carry him. Close behind him followed George calling out at every step for Fred to wait and share something nice with him. These invitations however seemed to have no effect upon Fred, for he merely increased his speed.

Now it so happened that the course Fred followed in his flight led behind the tent and down

the same narrow trail where George had had his disastrous encounter with Mr. Skunk only a short time before. It also happened that Mr. Skunk had not left the neighborhood with such eagerness as had George; indeed he had been inclined to linger around the same spot where they had met before.

As has been told the path was narrow and hard to follow and the night was growing darker every moment. Unfortunately for Fred a vine stretched across the path just before he came to the spot where George had searched for the "cat." This vine caught Fred's toe and he sprawled at full length on the ground; George, but a couple of steps in the rear of him, had to jump over the prostrate body of his friend in order to save himself from meeting the selfsame fate.

When Fred fell he not only surprised but greatly annoyed Mr. Skunk who was lurking only a few feet away. As a result Fred was treated to the same dose that had made George so unpopular around the camp.

Together the two boys returned to camp. They were fellow sufferers now. Though nearly overcome by the powerful stench, they bore with it long enough to walk arm in arm up to the fire and put Grant and John to sudden flight. This provided

them much amusement but the smell was too strong to be borne any longer.

"I guess we'll have to do as Grant advised," said George.

"What was that?"

"Throw our clothes away and take a swim."

"I guess you're right," said Fred and side by side the two boys made their way down the water's edge.

CHAPTER XIV

TALKING IT OVER

MONDAY morning came and found the four young campers eagerly awaiting the arrival of their challengers. There was great speculation as to what they would look like and whether or not any set of games between the two camps would provide an equal contest.

"I believe we can beat them," exclaimed George confidently.

"Don't be so sure," advised Grant. "You'd better wait until you see your opponents before you begin to make any predictions."

"That's right," said Fred. "You'd better not talk too much about it either, Pop. You'll need all your wind for the swimming and canoe races."

George gave the speaker a scornful glance but said nothing. The four friends finished their breakfast and lolled about the camp waiting for their rivals to appear.

"There they come now," exclaimed John after the lapse of about an hour.

"Where?" demanded George. "I don't see them."

"That tree is in your way, I guess," said John. "You'll see them in a minute or two."

"There they are!" exclaimed George suddenly. "Their boat looks just like the *Balsam*, doesn't it?"

"I think it is the same," said John. "It seems to me my father told me that there were two catboats on the lake made by the same man and made exactly alike."

"That'll be fine," said Fred eagerly. "No one can claim any advantage because of the boat then, and the best sailors will win."

"Let's hope we're the ones," laughed Grant. "Come on, who's coming down to the wharf to meet our guests?"

"We all are, I guess," exclaimed John, and a moment later the four boys were standing on the tiny dock waiting for the approaching catboat to come into their little harbor.

"They're good sailors all right," whispered Fred as he watched the boys in the boat maneuver their craft. "We'll have to be awfully good to beat them."

"All the more credit if we do," said Grant.

"Ahoy, there!" he shouted a moment later. "You'd better anchor a little way out from the dock here. We'll come out in the canoes after you."

"All right," came the reply. "Did you get our challenge?"

"We certainly did," said Grant.

"Good. I hope you'll accept it."

"Of course we will."

The boat swung around and one of the crew threw the anchor overboard. The sail was quickly lowered and everything was done in a quiet business-like way that instilled a great amount of respect into the hearts of the boys who, from the dock, were watching the proceedings.

A moment later Grant and John each took a canoe and set out from the shore. They came alongside the catboat, which was named the *Spruce,* and quickly transferred the crew to the canoes, and thence to the shore. One of the boys, Thomas Adams by name, seemed to be the spokesman for the party and he proceeded with Grant's help to introduce everybody all around.

Much laughter and embarrassment followed but before long all of the boys were quite at their ease. They left the dock and proceeded to the tent and all

sat down on the ground in front of it. It seemed that the camp at the end of the lake was very much like the one on the island. It was occupied by four boys of just about the same age as the others and practically of the same size.

"We thought it would be fun," said Thomas Adams speaking for his three friends as well as himself, "to challenge you fellows to a set of water sports. We heard that there were to be four of you on this island this summer and we saw you the other day just when you were leaving our camp; right after that storm I mean. We were sorry to miss you."

"We were sorry, too," said Grant.

"You were away when we came to see you too," said Thomas.

"Yes," said George, "we were off trout fishing for a few days."

"Have any luck?" asked Hugh McNeale one of the other visitors.

"Pretty good," said George. "We had a lot of fun too."

"Who caught the biggest fish?"

"Ask Fred here," grinned George. "He knows all about that."

Being urged to do so Fred proceeded to relate

the story of how George had carried off the prize. He did not spare himself in the telling either and left out no detail of how disappointed he had been to find that George had beaten him out. When he told how George had hooked his trout the story was greeted with gales of laughter and congratulations were showered upon the fortunate fisherman.

"A fellow with schemes like that would be hard to beat in any sort of a game," laughed Hugh.

"What sort of games are we going to have?" asked John.

"We thought a sailing race would be fun," said Hugh.

"Yes, and so would swimming and canoe races," exclaimed Grant. "Do you think three events will be enough?"

"How about a tilting contest?" said Thomas.

"What's a tilting contest?" asked Fred curiously.

"Didn't you ever hear of that?"

"Never that I know of."

"Why, it's like this," explained Thomas. "Two fellows get into a canoe; the one in the stern paddles and steers and the fellow in the bow has a great long pole with one end of it all wrapped up with rags or something like that. Another

canoe fixed up the same way opposes them and the two attack each other. The fellows with the poles jab at each other and try to upset the other canoe or knock the bow man overboard; if he falls overboard or the canoe upsets of course they lose the match."

"That sounds fine," exclaimed George. "I say we include a tilting match by all means."

"Two from our camp will take on two from yours," suggested Thomas.

"All right," agreed Grant. "We'll enter our star team."

"Entries will close one second before the match starts," laughed Franklin Dunbar, a fat, round-faced boy, who had spoken but little thus far.

"And probably our team will be upset and in the water one second after the match starts," laughed George.

"It'll be fun anyway," said Thomas. "When shall we have the games?"

"We were wondering about that too," said Grant. "I guess almost any time will suit us though."

"We'll need some practice," remarked Fred. "Don't forget that."

"Not much," said Grant. "I say not to prac-

tice too much. We don't want to make professional games out of them, you know."

"That's all right, too," objected Fred. "At the same time we want to make them worth while and the better we all are the more fun they will be too. Don't you think so?" and he appealed to the four young visitors for their opinion.

"I agree with you," said Thomas readily. "Our camp wants to beat yours too, and if you fellows don't take it seriously why there won't be much honor in it for us if we do win."

"There'd be plenty of disgrace if we lost under those conditions though," laughed Franklin Dunbar.

"We don't know anything about tilting either, Grant," said George. "We will need a lot of practice for that event."

"All right," agreed Grant. "I guess we do need practice. As far as I'm concerned, anything you fellows say suits me. How about a judge though? Suppose we should have a close finish in one of the races, who would we have to decide it for us?"

"My uncle is coming to spend a week with us in camp," said Hugh McNeale. "He might act as judge if we wanted him."

"That would be fine," exclaimed Grant. "When is he coming?"

"Not till week after next."

"That's all right," said Fred. "That would be just about right."

"Suppose we set two weeks from Wednesday then," suggested Thomas. "That ought to give us plenty of time to get in shape."

"All right," agreed Grant. "We ought to have some sort of name for our teams too. Have you any name for your camp?"

"No, we haven't."

"Neither have we. Suppose you call yourselves the red team and we'll be the blue."

"Fine," exclaimed Hugh. "I'll write a letter to Uncle Jack and tell him what he has ahead of him. I'll tell him that he really is to be the umpire and that he'll get the same treatment an umpire does if he doesn't do his job well."

The remaining details were speedily arranged and then the four boys of the red team sailed back to their camp, leaving the boys on the island full of excitement and pleasure at the thought of the games ahead of them.

CHAPTER XV

PREPARATION

THE days intervening until the time came for the games were busy ones for the boys in the island camp. The *Balsam* was thoroughly overhauled, and everything removed from her that might tend in any way to retard her speed. Frequent cruises were made and every boy was assigned to some special duty on the boat so that when the race was held there would be no confusion. None of the young campers had any desire to lose the race through inefficiency.

Long swims were indulged in to improve their wind and strengthen their muscles. Canoe races were held and different combinations tried to enable them to select the strongest team. A course a half-mile long was marked out and time-trials held in an effort to decide upon the fastest pair. All four boys were to be in the race but it had been decided that the best policy was to put the best two paddlers in the same canoe. By following this plan it was thought that their chances for win-

ning would be greatly improved. First place was to count two and second one in the sailing and canoe races and in the tilting match. In the swimming race three places were to count, the points to be scored being three for first, two for second and one for third. The team scoring the greatest number of points was to be declared the winner.

Practice for the tilting match occupied very much of the boys' time. Two long poles had been cut and one end of each was wound with old rags and blankets, thus forming a large soft knob.

"If we'd only saved those clothes that we had on when the skunks got after us," remarked George, "we could have won a tilting contest from anybody."

"What do you mean by that?" inquired Grant curiously.

"Simply this. Instead of using rags to wind the poles with we could have used those clothes."

"What advantage would that have been?"

"Don't you see?" demanded George. "All we'd have to do would be to point the pole at our opponent. We wouldn't have to touch him at all; as soon as he got a whiff of that awful odor he'd simply faint and fall overboard and we'd be the winners."

"A great idea, Pop," laughed John. "Why didn't you think of it at the time?"

"In the first place I didn't know anything about this tilting match at the time; in the second place, even if I had, I don't believe I'd have kept them. Whew, they were awful!" and George shuddered at the recollection.

"They certainly were," agreed Fred. "Don't talk to me about it; my clothes were all in the same condition as yours."

The same system that was adopted for selecting a team for the canoe race was used for the tilting match. Every possible combination of the four young campers was tried in an effort to find the strongest competitors. Grant and John had been selected for the canoe race, and Grant and George were decided upon for the tilting contest.

It had been taken for granted that Grant would be on both teams; he outshone his companions in every form of game and sport just as he did in his knowledge of books. He and George were heavier than the other two boys and consequently made a more powerful team for the tilting match. Weight would be an asset in that sport, for it is much easier to knock down a light man than it is a

heavy one; especially when a tricky and shaky canoe is under your feet.

"I seem to be out of it," remarked Fred ruefully when the final selections had been made.

"Why are you?" demanded Grant. "You're going to be in the canoe race just as much as John and I?"

"I know it, but I'm not on the first team."

"That's all right, you and Pop might beat us out after all."

"Huh," exclaimed Fred. "Pop doesn't do any work; he just sits there and expects me to do it all."

"You know that's not so, Fred," protested George warmly. "No one in the world works harder than I do."

"Well, if that's so," returned Fred, "all I can say is that there are an awful lot of loafers in the world."

"All four of us will be in every event except the tilting match," said John. "You and I are both out of that, Fred."

"You can save your strength while that's going on for the swimming race," said Grant. "We'll have to depend on you two to win first and second in that."

"How long is it going to be?" asked George.

"A hundred and seventy-five yards. Tom Adams was over here yesterday while you were away and we decided on that distance."

"It seems to me like a queer distance though," said George. "How did you ever happen to hit on that?"

"Why, we wanted to make it a hundred yards and they wanted a two-twenty. We finally compromised on a hundred and seventy-five yards."

"That's fair enough," said George. "How are we going to measure off these different distances?"

"Guess at them, I suppose," laughed John. "It won't make any difference whether they're exact or not, I guess."

"No, I imagine we're not going to break any time records so we needn't bother about such details," agreed George.

"We haven't had any practice so far to-day," remarked Fred. "What's the matter; are we afraid of getting over-trained?"

"That can be done easily enough, all right," said Grant. "Don't you remember what the track coach we had at school last year said?"

"He said I'd never make a runner if that's what you mean," laughed George.

"No, not that. What he said about training."

"What was it?" asked Fred. "I don't remember."

"Why, he said it was much better to be under-trained than over-trained. Another thing, when a fellow was training for a certain event he'd never let him run the full distance in practice."

"Is that so?" exclaimed George. "That doesn't sound logical to me though."

"All right," said Grant, "but you know which school won all the meets held anywhere around home, don't you?"

"We did," said George.

"That's just it," exclaimed Grant, "and yet you say that trainer was no good."

"I didn't mean to say that. All I said was that it didn't seem reasonable to me not to let a fellow run the full distance."

"Well, Mr. Smythe used to say that the great temptation for most fellows was to do too much work. They'd go out and run all the afternoon and hang around until they were tired out and then wonder why they felt heavy in the legs and had no life in them."

"Sailing can't hurt us anyway," said John.

"That's right," agreed Grant, "and I'm in favor of doing this: stop training for the events to-morrow. That'll leave us two days to rest up before the games are held and we can devote those two days to learning how little we know about sailing."

"I know that already," laughed George. "I'm afraid we're going to get a good beating in that race."

"Oh, I don't know," Fred objected. "They might run on a rock or something."

"That's our best chance all right," said George. "I have an idea that those fellows are all awfully good sailors."

"I hope we have some wind," said Grant hopefully. "We'll never finish the race unless we have a pretty stiff breeze. Personally I think the course is too long."

"Twice around the lake," said John. "That's not so far."

"It's pretty far," insisted Grant. "Wait until you see the buoys out and then you'll realize it."

"Who's going to put them out?"

"The red team," laughed Grant.

"They're doing most of the work, aren't they?" inquired Fred.

"Well, they wanted to; naturally I didn't object."

"They're going to get dinner over here, you know," said George. "That'll give us something to do."

"Just think of it," exclaimed John. "Won't we be hungry that day? The swimming and canoe races and the tilting contests all in the morning and then food. You'll have to cook a lot, Grant."

"I realize that," said Grant grimly. "I guess we can feed them though."

"Suppose we're all even at the end of the morning," exclaimed George. "That would certainly make the sailing race exciting, wouldn't it?"

"It sure would," Fred agreed. "We'll have plenty of time to sail it too, Grant. All afternoon ought to be long enough."

"That's right," said Grant. "Yes, I hope we can get around twice in one afternoon."

"This canoe race is what's bothering me," exclaimed George. "That'll take it out of us all right. It's hard work paddling and as long as Fred and I aren't the first team I wonder if it

wouldn't be better if we didn't go in it at all. If we were fresh for the swimming race that might increase our chances."

"I know," said Grant, "but it seems to me that every fellow ought to be in every event."

"But look here," George objected. "You and String are a much better pair than Fred and I. You simply walk away from us every time; we can't possibly beat you so what's the use?"

"You might get second, and that one point might win for us."

"I have an idea," exclaimed John suddenly. "Why not make it a relay race? We can race around the island and if we do that everybody can be in it and it seems to me it would be a lot more fun that way."

"That's fine," exclaimed George warmly. "Fred and I can paddle the first lap and you and Grant the second. Will those other fellows agree to it though?"

"I don't see why they shouldn't," said Grant. "It's just as fair as the other way; fairer if anything because it gives every one a chance."

"We'll have to ask them about it though," said John. "Why can't we sail down there now and see them?"

"We can," said George springing to his feet. "Let's do it, too."

A few moments later the *Balsam* was under way, headed for the end of the lake and the camp of the enemy, the red team.

CHAPTER XVI

GRANT MISSES

THE day set for the meet came at last. The first event, the tilting contest, was scheduled for eleven o'clock and a half an hour before that time the red team was on hand. The weather was ideal, bright and sunny and warm, with not too much breeze. This was as the boys desired, for they had hoped that the wind might not spring up until afternoon. At least that is the way they would have arranged matters if they had any power to do so. Strange to say it seemed as if the weather was to turn out just as they had hoped.

Hugh McNeale brought his Uncle Jack along and all the boys were captivated by him at once. He was a big, jolly man, full of fun, and with a laugh that made you feel as if you wanted to join in it every time you heard it. He was enthusiastic over the idea of being the judge and promised to do his very best.

"I also have a trophy for the winning team," he exclaimed. "It's something that you boys ought to have had in your camps anyway, but I haven't seen one in either and so I'm going to give it as a prize."

"What's that?" inquired Hugh curiously.

"See for yourself," exclaimed Mr. Maxwell, for that was the name of Hugh's uncle. He took a package from underneath his coat and unwrapping it, spread before the admiring gaze of the eight boys a silk American flag about three feet in length.

"Say!" said George enthusiastically. "That's worth working for, isn't it?"

"It certainly is," agreed the seven other boys, almost with one voice.

"That's the first prize," said Mr. Maxwell, evidently greatly pleased with the result the sight of the flag had produced. "Here's the second," and from his pocket he drew another flag of the same quality as the first but only half the size.

"I'm ashamed of you boys," he continued. "Both of these camps should have had a great big American flag flying right out in front of the tent. Let people see that you're patriotic and be proud of it."

"We are proud of it," objected Grant.

"Of course you are," said Mr. Maxwell readily. "I want you to show it off though. Have a flag, and every time you look at it don't think only of how beautiful it is. Remember what it stands for and how much you owe to it. Think of the country that stands back of that flag and of the millions of others who along with you have it for their national emblem. You're all glad you're Americans and you're proud of the fact and I want you never to be afraid to admit it. Be loyal to the flag, boys, and by your actions prove that you're worthy of the protection it affords you. And don't forget either that it's your duty as real American citizens to do your part. That's what so many forget so easily. You can't expect to receive benefits all the time and not give anything in return, you know."

"What can we do?" asked George, who along with all the others was deeply impressed by Mr. Maxwell's words.

"Just this: be good citizens. A good citizen is a man who not only obeys the laws of his country, but who is always working to make his country better. He puts his country's interests ahead of his own and that's a hard thing to do sometimes.

A good citizen stands by the mayor of his town, and the governor of his state, and the president of his country. Instead of sitting home and criticising them he gets out and works to help them in every way he can and he is loyal to them. Those men are behind this flag and if you are loyal to the flag, prove it by being loyal to the men behind it. Every man must do his part."

"I guess we're careless at times and don't think," said Grant soberly.

"That's true," agreed Mr. Maxwell. "That's no excuse for us though."

"But I didn't come here to make a speech," he continued laughingly. "I believe what I've just said with all my heart though. At present, however, I know there is a tilting contest to be held and we'd better start it at once. I'm anxious to see who gets the first two points towards winning the big flag."

Without further delay the four boys who were to compete in this event set about preparing themselves for it. Bathing suits were donned so that an upset would not cause any worry and the two canoes were soon ready for the fray.

Grant and George represented the blue team and Thomas Adams and Franklin Dunbar, the red.

Grant was bow man, with George to handle the canoe; Thomas was bow man, and Franklin paddled in the opposing boat.

The contest was staged in the little harbor and the judge and spectators took their positions on the tiny wharf. The canoes now faced each other some fifty feet apart, waiting for the signal.

"Not too fast now, Pop," warned Grant. "I don't want to fall out of the canoe before we even reach the other one, you know."

"I know," replied George. "I'll be careful."

"I'm going to stay down on one knee like this, too."

"That's a good scheme. Lock your feet around that thwart if you can. We want to beat those fellows."

"All ready?" came the call from shore.

"All ready," answered Grant, and Thomas did the same.

"Go," shouted Mr. Maxwell, and the match was on.

Franklin and George did not try to make speed however. In fact they were both very cautious and as a consequence, the two canoes approached each other slowly. Both pilots seemed willing to let the other man lead off in the attack.

"Careful, Pop," said Grant, without relaxing his gaze from his opponent's face for one instant.

"All right. I'm watching them."

Grant, crouched on one knee, was holding the pole as a mediæval knight would have held his lance in a jousting tournament. Thomas however, stood up in his canoe, gaining a little freedom of action perhaps, but at the same time increasing his chances of going overboard.

The canoes were only a few feet apart now and the bow men braced themselves for the onslaught.

"Let 'em have it now, Grant!" shouted John from the shore. Fred joined him in his exhortations, while Hugh and Herbert Halsey were just as noisy in their zeal to cheer their team on, and for the size of the audience the amount of sound produced was marvelous. Mr. Maxwell was the only one who was silent.

Closer came the two canoes. Now they were within range and Thomas lunged forward savagely at Grant. He ducked the blow and aiming one in return caught his opponent full in the stomach. Thomas uttered a loud grunt and fell backwards. As luck would have it however, he fell in the canoe. The light craft rocked dangerously and narrowly missed upsetting. As it was,

some water was shipped and had it not been for the skill of the two occupants it surely would have overturned.

"Quick, Grant!" urged George. "Hit him again before he can get up."

"Bring me closer to them."

George thrust his paddle into the water and the canoe shot forward. Franklin, however, with ready presence of mind had swung his canoe around the minute it righted itself and Grant's lunge at Thomas missed. Before George could bring his boat within range again, their opponents had recovered their balance and were prepared for the second attack.

Once more the canoes approached each other. This time Thomas followed Grant's example and crouched on one knee. He had evidently learned a lesson and had determined to be more wary.

"Get him, Grant! Get him!" shouted John

"Careful, George; not too fast," warned Grant.

He held his pole back waiting an opportunity to strike. This time he was determined that any blow he delivered would end the match; he had been outlucked before and did not want it to happen again.

Thomas made a feint at him. Grant was anxious and struck back so eagerly that he almost fell out of the canoe.

"That's the way, Tom," called Hugh. "You'll fix him this time."

Again Thomas feinted and again Grant lunged fiercely at his opponent. Thomas then followed up his bluff with a quick stab that luckily only struck Grant a glancing blow on the shoulder. Had it hit him squarely, the match most certainly would have been ended then and there; as it was only George's quick action saved them from going over.

"Don't let him fool you, Grant," he warned. "Wait for him."

Again they advanced and as they once more neared each other Thomas repeated his former tactics. He made a feint to lunge at Grant, and as before, Grant was unable to resist the temptation to strike back quickly. This he did and Franklin in the stern of the opposing canoe, anticipating this move, backed water and the blow missed Thomas' head by inches.

The poles the boys were using were long and heavy. As a result, they were somewhat clumsy and hard to handle. As Grant lunged forward at

Thomas, he leaned over the side of the canoe and the weight of his pole prevented him from regaining his balance at once.

Thomas and Franklin had evidently mapped out their plan of campaign beforehand and apparently Grant had acted exactly as they wished him to. Thomas held his pole with a shortened grip and before Grant could recover his equilibrium, he jabbed at him with all his might. The great wad on the end of the pole caught Grant squarely on the chest; he dropped his pole and waved his arms violently about his head in an effort to save himself.

All his efforts were of no use, however. Undoubtedly he would have gone overboard anyway, but just to make sure, Thomas gave him a gentle push with the business end of the pole and over he went. As he disappeared over the side he gave the canoe a shove with his feet and a moment later George joined him in the water.

CHAPTER XVII

GEORGE'S STRATEGY

A MOMENT later Grant and George came to the surface puffing and shaking the water from their eyes and hair. Both boys were laughing.

"Nice work," said Grant to their two opponents, who sat in their canoe nearby.

"We were lucky," protested Thomas.

"Lucky, nothing," exclaimed Grant. "You knew more about the game than we did and you deserved to win."

The canoe belonging to the defeated boys floated close at hand, bottom side up. The pole and the paddle were a short distance away. These were soon rescued and the canoe being righted, the contestants made their way to shore. John and Fred were the first to congratulate the winners.

"We'll have to win this canoe race," exclaimed Fred. "You fellows have two points to our one as it is now, and we can't afford to let you get twice as many again this time."

"We're going to do our best to get twice as many though, you may be sure of that," laughed Hugh McNeale. "We want that big flag."

"If you win it, you'll certainly be welcome to it," exclaimed John. "We want it ourselves though, I can tell you."

The best of feeling existed between the two camps, but this fact did not serve to lessen the competition and rivalry. Good sportsmanship adds zest to every game.

"Where are the first pairs for this canoe race?" cried Mr. Maxwell. "We mustn't let these events lag, you know."

"We'll be ready in a minute," replied Grant. "We want to get all our wind back and remove all the water from this canoe first."

"That's right," said Herbert Halsey. "You fellows take your time."

The suggestion of the blue team that the next event be made a relay race around the island, had met with an enthusiastic response from their rivals. Two teams from each camp were to compete and each team was to paddle once around. The first pairs consisted of George and Fred, from the blue team and opposed to them were Herbert

Halsey and Franklin Dunbar, from the red. Finishing the race were Grant and John, against Hugh McNeale and Thomas Adams. Each camp had selected its strong team to paddle last, hoping to win the race by a powerful finish.

"I guess we're all ready now," said Grant, when a few moments had elapsed. "We'll go ahead any time you say."

"All right," said Mr. Maxwell. "Now remember the rules; the starting line is directly opposite this dock and I've got some string which we will use for tape at the finsh. Each team is to paddle once around the island. When the second relay starts, the two canoes that have finished will be stationed out here about twenty feet apart and this string will be stretched between them; that will be the finish line. All four canoes will be used of course and the second relay must not start until those completing the first have touched the canoes with their paddles. Is it all clear?"

"All clear," said Grant, and Thomas answered for his side.

"Very well," exclaimed Mr. Maxwell. "The first canoes may take their places and the second relay had better be ready too."

George and Fred pushed out from the dock and paddled slowly to the starting point; Herbert and Franklin followed close behind.

When they were in position, and by the way the red team had drawn the course nearest shore, Mr. Maxwell lifted his small megaphone and gave his final instructions.

"Remember," he called, "once around, and the inside team this lap will be the outside next. Don't get mixed up."

"That'll be a little help to us," said John in a low voice to Grant. "I hope Fred and Pop can give us a little lead to start out with."

"I hope so too," replied Grant.

"On your marks!" shouted Mr. Maxwell.

Four boys sat up alert and eager for the final word.

"Get set!"

Four paddles were raised and held poised for instant action.

"Go!"

The blades were dipped deeply into the water and the race was on. Side by side the two canoes sped along.

"You fellows better go out there and take your

places," said Mr. Maxwell, turning to the four boys who were to continue the race the next relay. "We don't want any mixup then, you know. It would be a shame to have those boys paddle over half a mile for nothing."

In response to his suggestion, Grant and John, and Hugh and Thomas, paddled slowly out to the starting line, there to await the arrival of their respective team-mates.

"Take it slow, Fred," urged George from his position in the stern of the racing canoe. "Don't kill yourself right at the start."

They had covered about one hundred yards of their course and all four boys were paddling with every ounce of strength they possessed.

"Dip your paddle deep," he continued. "Take a long easy stroke. A good steady pace is what we want."

"They'll get way ahead of us," protested Fred.

"What if they do? They'll be all in at the finish and we'll start a sprint."

In response to George's suggestion they eased up materially. As Fred had predicted the other canoe immediately began to draw away, for its two occupants did not relax their efforts for an instant.

Wider and wider the gap opened between them until thirty feet separated the two racers when they came to the first turn.

The island was oval in its shape, very much like an egg. The start had been made from a point about midway between the two ends. The first stretch, therefore, was half the length of the island, then the corner was turned and the whole length of the island was covered, ending with the home stretch, half the length of the island again.

Steadily and strongly, George and Fred paddled. Herbert and Franklin still worked desperately, taking nearly three strokes to the other boys' two, and as a result, the gap between the two boats continually widened.

"Don't let it worry you, Fred," said George. "They can't keep up that pace very much longer."

"They're not weakening yet though, Pop."

"I know it, but we've only covered half the course so far."

Steadily the red team's canoe drew away. Forty, fifty feet, they were in the lead now. If any one had been in a position to observe, however, he would have seen that its occupants were beginning to show signs of weakening. Their breath came faster and faster, the perspiration rolled off

their faces in streams, and their muscles began to ache and throb.

Relentlessly George and Fred followed them. Not one bit did they increase their efforts, though George had great difficulty in restraining his companion. Powerful, even strokes urged their tiny craft on and now they were holding their own. Just ahead of them was the last turn which was to bring them into the home stretch.

"How do you feel, Fred?" asked George.

"Fine."

"Are you tired?"

"Not very."

"I hope not. We'll start a sprint the second we round that turn and we'll have to put all we've got into it."

The leading canoe was even now turning the point. The boys in it were plainly tired as their frequent splashing showed. They still worked desperately, however, and it would be no mean task to overtake them.

Grant and John sat in their canoe at the starting point eagerly awaiting the appearance of their team-mates. To their dismay, it was Franklin and Herbert who first hove in sight and to the waiting boys it seemed as if hours elapsed before

George and Fred rounded the turn. At last they appeared, however, over thirty yards in the rear.

"Now, Fred!" urged George, as they started on the home stretch. "Let 'em have it."

Like demons the two boys began to ply their paddles. The light canoe was quick to respond and it fairly flew over the water. Foot by foot and yard by yard they gained on their fast-tiring opponents.

Franklin and Herbert paddled desperately. Their strength was gone however; they had used it all up at the start of the race. Their arms felt like great chunks of lead and it was all the two boys could do to make them respond to the urging of their wills.

At race-horse speed, George and Fred plowed along. The gap between the two canoes began to disappear as if by magic. The steady pace they had maintained had tired them, to be sure, but they still had plenty of reserve strength left and they were using it now when it counted most. The cheers of their team-mates waiting for them came faintly to their ears, spurring them on.

"We've got 'em, Fred! We've got 'em!" exclaimed George triumphantly. "Stick to it."

Fifty yards away was the finish line and the canoes were almost on even terms. Forty yards

and George and Fred were in the lead. Their rivals were beaten, dead tired, and possessed of scarcely the strength necessary to urge their canoe across the line.

Thirty yards from home and George and Fred enjoyed a lead of nearly five yards. They were moving at easily twice the speed of their opponents now. It seemed certain that Grant and John were to be handed a splendid head-start for the last relay, when an unexpected and most disheartening thing suddenly happened.

CHAPTER XVIII

A CLOSE MATCH

FIFTEEN yards from the finish Fred's paddle broke. It snapped off short in his hand and as a result, the canoe almost upset. It seemed as if their splendid effort was to go for nothing. Herbert and Franklin, seeing the plight of their rivals, were endowed with new hope that they might win their relay after all. The hope thus aroused gave them just strength enough to urge their canoe forward across the line. Herbert lifted his paddle and touched the canoe in which Hugh and Thomas waited so impatiently, and then sank back against the thwart exhausted.

The disaster to Fred was nearly fatal. The canoe rocked dangerously and though it did not turn over, it lost every bit of its momentum.

"Sit down, Fred!" shouted George. "I'll paddle."

One man against two is a severe handicap, how-

ever, even if those two are well nigh exhausted. It must be remembered also that George too, was nearly fagged out. In spite of his usual light-heartedness, he had an indomitable will, however, and not one of the boys had more nerve than he.

He dipped his blade deep into the water, brought the bow of the canoe around so that it pointed in the proper direction, and urged it forward. Meanwhile the other canoe had passed them and crossed the line at least five yards in the lead.

Grant and John were off like a flash, however, and the advantage the red team enjoyed was not insurmountable by any means.

"That was tough luck, boys," exclaimed Mr. Maxwell earnestly to Fred and George. "You two certainly deserved to win that relay."

"You surely did," echoed Franklin Dunbar. "That was about the toughest luck I ever saw."

"Fred's too strong," laughed George. "It's awfully hard to get any paddle that he won't break."

"Don't pay any attention to what he says, Mr. Maxwell," urged Fred. "He thinks he can tease me; personally, I think he's crazy."

"I hope not," laughed Mr. Maxwell.

"He's fresh though," insisted Fred.

"Not now," puffed George. "My breath's gone and I'm all in."

"That was a great race," insisted Mr. Maxwell. "I don't remember ever having seen a better one."

"We were about twenty-five yards ahead of them at one time, you know," said Herbert. "I thought we would win easily."

"So did I," exclaimed Fred. "You kept drawing away from us all the time and I thought we wouldn't even be in it. I wanted to paddle harder all the time but Pop here wouldn't let me. He insisted that we keep up a steady gait and sprint at the end."

"My system was all right, wasn't it?" demanded George.

"It surely was. You didn't count on the paddle breaking, though."

"Oh, yes, I did. I knew that if you exerted all your strength that any paddle would snap; that's the reason I wanted you to save it until the end. Suppose you'd cut loose over the other side of the island and the paddle had broken there. We'd have been in a nice fix, wouldn't we?" and George winked solemnly at their three visitors who seemed

much amused at his efforts to secure a rise from his companion.

"Oh, dry up!" exclaimed Fred shortly, and George laughed gleefully at having accomplished his purpose.

Meanwhile the two other canoes were rounding the first turn.

"Sprint, John! Sprint!" Grant urged the moment they had started. "Catch up to them and hang right on to them all the way around."

Paddling with all their strength Grant and John succeeded in catching up with their opponents. When the bow of their canoe was within a few feet of the stern of the other they eased up a bit and contenting themselves with allowing their rivals to set the pace, they kept their position with bulldog determination.

Thomas and Hugh sprinted. Grant and John followed suit. If the leading canoe slackened its pace the one behind did the same. Like a shadow the two Go Ahead boys dogged their opponents' course.

Such a proceeding always worries the leader. To know that a step behind him is some one who follows him like grim death and who cannot be

shaken off by any means whatsoever, is bound to have its effect in the long run. The pace-maker is irritated and bewildered and sometimes demoralization follows as a result.

Grant was aware of this and he intended to make the most of it. He knew that if Thomas and Hugh discovered that it was out of the question to pull away from the pursuing canoe their confidence would be shaken and once this quality is lost, a great asset is gone.

It is easier to follow the pace than to make it. Another advantage is that the one behind can watch his opponent and note everything that he does. The leader, on the other hand, cannot tell what his rival intends to do and must always be on his guard lest he be taken by surprise.

Thomas and Hugh worked desperately. Evidently they had decided that their best chance was to tire out the boys in the canoe that followed them so relentlessly. With this object in view they started a sprint when they had covered about one-third of the course and they kept it up. Their team mates had tried to sprint the entire distance, and failed. Could these two do it? George and Fred had been content to allow their rivals to gain on them, but not so Grant and John. Their one

idea was to hang on and hang on and hang on, until the time should come when an opportunity offered itself for a quick dash into the lead. This chance had not yet presented itself.

The four boys worked like demons. Down the whole length of the island they raced, neck and neck. The same amount of open water showed between the two canoes all the way along. It almost looked as if the first canoe was towing the other. Maintaining these same positions they approached the last turn.

"Now, String!" said Grant in a low voice. "When they take this curve, I'm going to shoot in between them and the shore. Be ready."

"All right," replied John, without looking up from his task for an instant.

The leading canoe now turned and began to round the point of the island. Close behind them followed Grant and John. Thomas and Hugh were not far from shore, so that Grant would not have much room to pass, if indeed such a thing was possible. Just before the canoes entered the straightaway leading to the finish line, the two Go Ahead boys made their bid for the lead.

Grant in the stern swung the canoe in between the other and the shore. The space was limited

but their chance had come. It was now or never.

"Now, String!" cried Grant. "Let 'em have it!"

It seemed impossible that the two boys could work any harder than they had been. Every one seems to have some reserve strength, however, no matter how much he may have used before, and it was this store that Grant and John called upon now.

Inch by inch they crept up. Soon Thomas from the stern of his canoe could see out of the corner of his eye the bow of the blue team's canoe.

"Paddle, Hugh!" he cried. "Paddle for all you're worth!"

It was a desperate contest, but Grant and John were not to be denied. The difference that setting the pace or following it made, was just enough to give them a slight advantage. As far as skill and strength were concerned, the four boys were remarkably well matched.

Down the home stretch they dashed, and little by little Grant and John gained. They gained steadily also, and it was evident that if the course were long enough they would be returned winners. But could they catch and pass their rivals before the finish line was reached? That was what worried

Fred and George, who screamed themselves hoarse in their eagerness to spur their comrades on.

No open water showed between the boats now. A few yards more and the red team was but three-quarters of a length ahead. Soon this was reduced to half a length and still Grant and John gained. The line was but a few yards distant now however. Could they do it?

The veins stood out on their foreheads. Between their clenched teeth their breath came in gasps. Still they struggled on, still they gained slowly, almost imperceptibly and nearer and nearer they came to the finsh.

"If the course was only a few yards longer," groaned George as he watched the stirring finish from the canoe.

A moment later and the two racers were almost on even terms. It was nearly impossible to tell which one was in the lead now, so evenly were they matched. The tape was only a few feet away. With one final effort the four young racers urged their canoes forward; they broke the tape and shot on past. The race was over.

CHAPTER XIX

A CLOSE SHAVE

"WELL!" exclaimed George. "I never saw anything to beat that!"

"Who won?" demanded Fred.

"Don't ask me. I'm not the judge."

The boys turned and looked at Mr. Maxwell who was seated in the other canoe with Franklin and Herbert. His face was turned towards the two canoes which had just flashed across the finish line. He wore a puzzled expression and was evidently at a loss what to say.

"Who won?" called George.

Mr. Maxwell turned and looked at the speaker sorrowfully. "No one," he said.

"No one," exclaimed George. "Why, how can that be?"

"Couldn't it be a tie?" asked Fred quietly.

"Why, yes, of course. I hadn't planned for a tie though."

"I declare the race a tie," announced the judge solemnly. "If either boat was ahead of the other,

I'm sure I didn't see it, and I wouldn't dare call it anything else."

The racers had turned around and were now making their way slowly back. All four of the boys were well nigh exhausted, but they were smiling nevertheless.

"Who won?" called Thomas, for they had not heard the judge's verdict.

"It was a tie," said George.

"A tie?" exclaimed Grant, his face falling. "That's bad."

"Why is it?" demanded George.

"Because we needed the points."

"By the way," exclaimed Hugh, "how do we award the points?"

"Split them, don't we?" said Fred readily, appealing to Mr. Maxwell.

"Each team gets one and a half. Two for first and one for second makes a total of three, and a half of three is one and a half."

"Whew!" whistled George. "You certainly are quick at figures."

A general laugh went up at Fred's expense but he did not seem to mind.

"That's the way it's figured out anyway," said Mr. Maxwell. "That makes the total points three

and a half for the red team and two and a half for the blue."

"Still one point behind," exclaimed Grant. "We'll have to get that back somehow."

"Well," said Thomas, "the swimming race comes next and three places count in that. Three for first, two for second, and one for third; you'll have a fine chance to catch us there."

"I was just thinking," interrupted Mr. Maxwell, "that it might be a good idea to reverse the order of these last two events. You boys are pretty well tired out after that canoe race and to swim a hundred and seventy-five yards now would be quite a severe strain. What do you say to our having the sailing race next?"

"Why," said Grant slowly, "I don't see any objection to that. What do the rest of you fellows think about it?"

"How about dinner?" exclaimed George. "We could never finish by the time we had planned to eat and I must say I'm hungry right now."

"So am I," said Hugh so earnestly that everyone laughed.

"Why don't we have dinner right now then?" suggested Mr. Maxwell. "As soon as we are through we can start the sailing race."

"That's a good scheme," exclaimed Grant. "Let's do that."

"And have the swimming race after the sailing?" queried Thomas.

"That's right," said Grant. "The water's more apt to be quiet later in the day than it is now and that will make it better for swimming."

"Very true," agreed Mr. Maxwell. "The wind often seems to go down with the sun and if the wind goes down the water becomes still."

Without further delay they made their way ashore and preparations for dinner were at once started. Grant usually did all the cooking, but to-day he had an abundance of help. Wood was quickly gathered and a blazing fire was soon under way.

Two of the boys were set to work peeling potatoes which were to be fried in the pan. Others made ready the dishes and collected the knives and forks. Mr. Maxwell had several good sized bass he had caught before breakfast, and, what was even better, he had brought along a dozen and a half ears of green corn, two for everyone present. Was it any wonder that the young campers' eyes sparkled with anticipation as they saw the dinner being prepared?

Their appetites were keen as only those in the woods can understand. The fragrant odor of sizzling bacon and roasting corn coming to their nostrils only served to increase their eagerness.

"Isn't this great?" cried George enthusiastically, when at last dinner was announced as ready and the pleasant task of disposing of it had begun. "If anything can beat this, I'd like to know what it is."

"There is nothing that can tie it even," laughed Mr. Maxwell, who seemed to be enjoying himself as much as any of the boys.

"I only hope Pop won't eat so much, he'll sink the *Balsam,*" said Fred doubtfully. "We have plenty of ballast aboard as it is."

"You 'tend to your own dinner," advised George very promptly. "I'm too busy to waste any time talking to you now."

At last the meal was over, and every one had had sufficient to eat.

"All ready to start the race?" inquired Mr. Maxwell.

"Oh," groaned Franklin, "I don't feel as if I could move. I'd rather crawl off somewhere and go to sleep. I guess I ate too much."

"I *know* I did," laughed John.

"We'd better start though, I guess," urged Grant. "The course is long and while there's a good breeze now you can't tell how long it will last."

"That's right," agreed Mr. Maxwell. "You'd better get ready."

The boys at once made their way to their respective boats and made the final preparations for the race. Both boats had had their sails up all the morning in order to dry them out thoroughly and there was very little left to be done.

Mr. Maxwell sat in a canoe near at hand and watched the boys.

"Remember," he said, "twice around the course. The first lap you go one way and the second in the opposite. Be very careful to round every stake. The start is from the same spot as the canoe race and the finish is there, too. I will fire this pistol as a warning gun, and three minutes later I will fire it again for the start. Be sure not to cross the starting line before I give the second signal."

"All right," said Grant. "We're all ready."

"So are we," echoed Thomas from the *Spruce*.

"Very well then," said Mr. Maxwell. "Get your anchors up and move out by the starting line."

This was soon done and a few moments later the two catboats were jockeying back and forth off the entrance to the little harbor. Fred was at the tiller of the *Balsam* and Hugh guided the *Spruce*.

The sharp crack of the pistol announced that the race was about to start. Grant had been waiting, watch in hand, for this signal.

"Take a short tack out and back, Fred," he urged. "I'll watch the time."

"Hard-a-lea!" called Fred as he put the tiller over and the *Balsam* came around into the wind. His crew quickly shifted sides, the sheet was hauled taut, and the trim little boat scudded swiftly along before the fresh breeze.

"Better go back now," advised Grant when they had covered fifteen or twenty yards. He scarcely lifted his eyes from his watch which he still held in his right hand. "We've got a minute and a half more."

Once more the *Balsam* came about and began to retrace its short course towards the starting line. The *Spruce* was just off its starboard side, with bow pointing directly into the wind and consequently was almost stationary.

"We'll cross the line too soon," exclaimed John nervously. "We'll have to come back if we do."

"Leave that to me," said Grant confidently, his eyes still on the second-hand of his watch. "I'll look out for that."

"We're not a dozen feet from the line now though," cried John in alarm. "You'd better come around, Fred."

"Don't you do it," exclaimed Grant sharply.

Closer and closer to the line they came. John, and for that matter Fred and George also were intensely nervous for fear they should cross the line before the signal. Grant, however, seemed confident that they were on the safe side.

"We'll have to turn around and start all—" began John, when Grant suddenly interrupted him.

"Now," he cried, and barely the fraction of a second behind his voice came the sound of the starting gun. Almost simultaneously the *Balsam* crossed the line; away to a splendid start and with a good lead of at least fifteen or twenty feet on the *Spruce*.

CHAPTER XX

GEORGE SURPRISES HIS FRIENDS

"I TAKE it all back, Grant," exclaimed John. "You're all right."

"It was certainly close though," said Fred solemnly.

"But 'close' doesn't count in any game, you know," laughed Grant.

"How about quoits?" inquired George.

"That's right, Pop," exclaimed Grant, "it does count in quoits, but I don't know of any other."

"We'd better attend to our sailing," warned Fred. "Trim that sheet in a little, String."

"That enough?"

"All right," said Fred. "My, I hope this breeze holds."

"It's getting stronger, I think," said George.

"It does seem to be," agreed Grant. "It's dead ahead of us now, but if it doesn't change, it'll be right behind us on the last leg of the race. I think it's always fun to be able to finish straight before the wind."

"That's true," exclaimed John. "We go in the opposite direction the second round, don't we?"

The *Balsam* was skimming over the water rapidly on a long tack to leeward. Behind her came the *Spruce,* also making good time and with about the same distance between the two boats that had separated them at the start.

"They're pointing up a little more than we are, I think," remarked Grant, after a glance at their rival.

"We're all right, though," said Fred confidently. "I don't believe in sailing as close hauled as that."

"Perhaps not," agreed Grant. "At any rate you know more about it than the rest of us. We'll have to do as you say whether we like it or not."

They rounded the first stake thirty yards ahead of the *Spruce.* Fred's tactics on the first leg had proved successful, anyway.

"It's easy," exclaimed George confidently, as they slid past the stake and settled back for the long reach to the next mark.

"Don't talk like that, Pop," urged John earnestly. "Don't ever boast or get overconfident; you're sure to regret it if you do."

"Knock on wood, Pop," laughed Fred. "That'll take away all the bad effects."

The four friends were in excellent spirits, for they enjoyed a comfortable lead which seemed to be steadily increasing.

"There they come around the stake now," exclaimed Grant, gazing behind them. "They gave it a little more room than we did."

"And consequently sailed a little bit farther than necessary," added Fred. "A few feet doesn't seem very much at the time but in the long run it amounts to a good deal."

"On the other hand," said John, "if you cut too close to the stake you're apt to foul it and then you're disqualified."

"The answer to that is easy enough," laughed Fred. "Don't hit it."

"You fellows take more chances than I would," said John doubtfully. "I believe in playing safe."

Steadily the *Balsam* drew away from her rival. The wind was strong now and the lake was dotted with white-caps.

"Perhaps the *Balsam* is a rough-water sailor," remarked Grant. "At any rate she seems to be doing splendidly in this breeze."

"If the breeze should die down they'd probably

catch right up to us," said Fred. "Let's hope it doesn't."

"What makes you think they'd catch us?" demanded John.

"Nothing. Some boats sail better in one kind of a breeze than in others. This seems to be suited to a strong wind and I thought it was possible that the *Spruce* would do better in a light one."

"But they're exactly alike," objected John.

"I know it," replied Fred. "That doesn't necessarily mean they'll sail just alike, though. I've seen ten boats all built on the same model, the same size, and everything about them the same, and yet some of them seem to be twice as fast as others."

"It must be in the one who handles the boat, then," said George.

"Not at all. I've seen them swap crews and the same boats win."

"How do you explain it?" inquired Grant, who always liked to have a reason for everything.

"I can't, and I don't believe any one else can, either. Some boats seem to do well under certain conditions, and that's all there is to it."

"Well, the present conditions seem to suit the

Balsam pretty well," exclaimed George. "Let's hope they continue."

The second stake was reached with the *Balsam* still farther in the lead than before. The wind steadily increased in strength and forced the sturdy little catboat through the water at an amazing speed.

"I didn't know she could go so fast," exclaimed John enthusiastically.

"None of us did, I guess," said Grant. "She's all right though, isn't she?"

"I should say so," cried George. "Say, just look at her go," and he scrambled over to the other side of the boat. The *Balsam* was heeled far over and the lee rail was awash. Now and then a wave, a little larger than its fellows, slapped lustily against the side and covered the crew with spray.

"We'll have to reef her if this wind gets much stronger," said Fred just before they had completed the first round.

"What's the use?" demanded George. "It's great this way, and we're certainly gaining on those fellows all the time."

"Yes," said Fred, "but you don't want to lose the mast, do you?"

"Or we might upset," added Grant.

"Suppose we do," cried George. "It won't hurt us."

"But we'd lose the race just the same," said Fred. "Let that sheet out a little there, String. Whenever she heels over like that, give her a little more rope and I'll bring her up into the wind for a second."

"That makes us lose time, doesn't it?" asked Grant.

"I think so. It seems to me that if we stopped and put a reef in the sail we'd sail more evenly and as a result we'd go faster."

"Those fellows in the *Spruce* don't seem to be putting in any reefs, I notice," remarked George. "If they don't need them I don't see why we do."

"But the breeze is getting so much stronger," insisted Fred. "It really seems to me that we should put in one reef anyway."

"How long will it take us?"

"Not two minutes. We can do it in no time."

"We'd better wait until we round this next stake, I think," said Grant. "We can do it, then."

"All right," agreed George. "I don't believe in it, though. I love it this way," and he ex-

claimed delightedly as the *Balsam* heeled far over and the spray from the crest of one of the white-caps drenched him from head to foot.

"It's cold, though," objected John.

"Nonsense," cried George. "If you were half a man you wouldn't mind it."

John merely shivered, and placing Grant in temporary charge of the sheet he crawled forward and drawing his sweater out from under the deck, he put it on.

"Get ready now," warned Fred. "The stake is just ahead."

"And we're going to take in a reef as soon as we round it. Is that right?" inquired Grant.

"That's the idea," said Fred. "Here we go," and putting the tiller hard over he brought the *Balsam* cleanly around the mark and headed her up into the wind.

"Let go that topping lift, Pop!" he cried. "Loose your halyards there, Grant! Now, String, let's get busy!"

He left his post, and ordering and helping his comrades, he took charge of the work of reefing. He had predicted two minutes for the work, but it took at least five, and before they had finished the *Spruce* was almost up to them.

"Hurry, Fred, hurry!" urged George. "They're catching us."

"All right," cried Fred, springing back to the tiller. "Haul in your sheet there, String!"

The bow of the *Balsam* swung slowly around and as the sail filled she began to slip through the water once more. Not twenty-five yards behind them now came the *Spruce,* her full sail spread. Thomas waved his hand and shouted something to the four Go Ahead boys but the wind blew the sound away and the words were lost.

"What did he say?" demanded John.

"I didn't hear," said George. "He probably said they'd catch us in a few minutes, and I guess they will, too."

"You're a pessimist, Pop," said Fred, but he looked back anxiously at the *Spruce* plowing along behind them.

"No, I'm not either," exclaimed George. "I do think we made a mistake in reefing that sail, though."

"Wait and see," said Fred, but he himself appeared to be anxious.

"If the wind should die down we'd be in a nice fix," said George in a discouraged tone of voice.

"It doesn't seem to be going down now,

though," said Grant. "Just see us go! And look at all the white-caps. I really think we're doing better than we did before."

"But we're not gaining on them any more," insisted George gloomily.

"We don't need to," laughed Grant. "All we have to do is to hold our lead."

The relative position of the two boats was unchanged at the end of the first leg on the second round. The *Balsam* still enjoyed her lead of twenty-five yards over her rival. They had covered only a short distance on the second leg when George suddenly remarked that the wind was dying down.

"I know it is," he insisted. "Just look; we aren't tipping half as much as we were."

"I hope you're wrong, Pop," said Fred anxiously.

"But I'm not. Can't you see it yourself?"

"Perhaps you're right. At any rate it may only be a lull."

In silence the four young sailors watched the sail and looked out over the water and gazed fearfully at the *Spruce* so close behind them now.

"She's gaining," announced John.

"No doubt of it," said George. "What shall we do?"

"What can we do?" demanded John in despair.

"Can't we take the reef out?"

"If we did," said Fred, "we'd have to stop, and they'd surely pass us, and whether we'd ever catch them or not would be a question."

"But won't they pass us if we don't take the reef out?" demanded George.

"I don't know. We've got to take a chance either way."

"And no matter what we do," added George, "we're bound to lose."

"Cheer up, Pop," urged Grant. "The wind hasn't gone down very much and they haven't passed us yet."

"Can't we take the reef out while we're going like this?" demanded George.

"Oh, we can," said Fred. "It would be awfully hard, though, and dangerous, too; besides that, we might tear the sail."

"Let me try it," begged George. "We mustn't lose this race and that's all there is about it."

Working under Fred's guidance, and taking des-

perate chances George finally succeeded in shaking the reef out of the sail. The halyards were tightened and once again the *Balsam* moved along under her full spread of canvas.

"Now I feel better," sighed George, as he settled back in the cockpit once more. "That short sail worried me."

"We certainly lost a lot of time fooling around there," observed Fred. "It was all my fault, too."

"Forget it," exclaimed Grant. "We're still ahead of them, aren't we?"

"But not much," said Fred, and he glanced hastily around at the *Spruce* not more than fifteen yards distant now.

"I hope they don't get our wind," said George. "It's certainly going down and we need every bit of it we can get."

"You're right, Pop," said John. "The wind is lighter and you know what Fred said about the *Spruce* probably doing better than the *Balsam* in a light breeze."

Still maintaining their slight advantage the *Balsam* turned the last stake and started down the home stretch. The wind was dead astern of both boats now and the sails were stretched at right

angles to the mast in order to get the full benefit of the breeze.

"They'll blanket us, I'm afraid," muttered Fred gloomily.

"What do you mean by that?" asked George.

"Why, they'll get right behind us and shut off all our wind."

"Don't let them do it, then."

"You don't think I'd let them on purpose, do you?"

"They'll catch us on this straight away, I'm afraid," said Grant in a low voice. The boats were so close together now it was necessary to speak softly to keep from being overheard.

"Everybody move back towards the stern," ordered Fred. "Perhaps if we get her bow out of water a little she'll do better."

They followed Fred's directions, but little by little the *Spruce* crept up on them. The wind was dropping rapidly; it seemed that on this woodland lake storms and winds came and went with equal facility.

The *Spruce* had blanketed their boat momentarily as Fred had predicted. Drawing even, however, the *Balsam* once more caught the breeze and the racers moved forward on even terms.

"We certainly have some great finishes, don't we?" called Hugh from the other boat.

"Well, I should say so!" exclaimed Grant. "They're heartbreaking."

All at once George left his seat and moved forward.

"Where are you going, Pop?" demanded Fred. "You'd better come back here and sit down."

George, however, paid no attention to this advice nor did he deign any answer. He continued serenely on his way until his reached the forward deck. Straightening himself up, his amazed companions saw him place his right hand on the mast and scratch it with his finger-nails.

CHAPTER XXI

HOW THE PLAN WORKED

"HE'S gone crazy," muttered Grant. "What does he think he's doing?"

George, having completed his strange performance, returned to the stern of the *Balsam* and quietly resumed his seat.

"What were you trying to do?" demanded John curiously.

"I scratched the mast."

"I know you did. Why did you do it?"

"To give us more breeze."

"I suppose scratching the mast is going to make the wind blow," and John laughed loudly. "I think you're crazy, Pop."

"Wait and see," said George calmly. "I remember that I once read somewhere about sailors scratching the mast when they wanted a breeze, so I thought I'd try it. We need to try everything if we want to win this race. They're ahead of us now."

"All right," smiled John. "I guess you didn't do any harm anyway."

"That's the way I figured," exclaimed George. "All sailors are superstitious and they believe in those things. As long as we're sailing, why don't we try them ourselves?"

"Where's your breeze?" demanded Grant.

"There it comes," said George, pointing astern of them. A puff of wind was approaching and a patch of the water could be seen to be ruffled by its breath. A moment later it struck the *Balsam* and in answer the little catboat increased its speed.

"Why won't the breeze help them as much as it does us?" inquired Fred.

"We'll hope they won't get any of it," said George. "You notice that that last puff didn't hit them and that we gained a little by it."

"It's certainly close," said Grant. "We don't want another tie, though, and we don't want second place, either."

"Only a quarter of a mile to go," said Fred. "We'll need more wind."

"Scratch the mast again, Pop," urged John.

George did so and another gust of wind caught them and drove them along a little faster.

"Isn't that queer?" exclaimed Grant. "It seems to work though. Try it again, Pop."

Again George scratched the mast and once more a puff of wind caught their sail. The *Balsam* was now several feet ahead of her rival and rapidly approaching the finish.

"Don't do it any more, Pop," urged Fred. "At least don't do it as long as we are ahead. If they catch up to us try it again. Of course it's all luck, but it is certainly strange, isn't it?"

"It surely is," agreed John. "How do you account for it?"

"You can't account for it," exclaimed Grant. "You don't suppose that scratching the mast really makes the wind blow, do you? It has just happened that way, that's all."

Nearer and nearer the two boats came to the finish. Waiting for them was Mr. Maxwell, seated in one of the canoes, on a line with the tape.

"A little more sheet, String," said Fred. "That'll do."

"They're almost up to us," whispered John, doing as Fred had ordered. "Let Pop scratch the mast again."

George was eagerly awaiting a signal to do this very thing. Fred nodded to him, and using both

hands this time George scratched the mast lustily. Call it coincidence or luck or whatever you like, a strong puff of wind struck the *Balsam* almost immediately. She heeled over and for the first time in a half-hour made such speed that it was possible to hear the water rippling under her bow.

"Here we go!" cried George lustily, and with a rush the *Balsam* swept forward and crossed the line a good six feet ahead of their rival.

"*Balsam* wins!" shouted Mr. Maxwell, and a hearty cheer for the victor was immediately given by the crew of the defeated boat.

"How did you like my stunt?" grinned George proudly, addressing his remarks to his three companions. "Any time you want to win a sailing race just come to me and I'll tell you how to do it."

"Huh!" snorted Fred, "I suppose you'll have a big head for the next year on account of that."

"Look here, Fred," exclaimed George, winking at his other friends. "I wouldn't say very much if I were you. You insisted upon reefing the sail and as a result we nearly lost the race; if it hadn't been for my great brain and cleverness we surely would have been beaten. However, as long as it turned out the way it did I will forgive you."

"I made an error of judgment and yours was nothing but luck," retorted Fred. "I want you to remember that, too."

The boats were now returning to their moorings and when they had been made fast the crews went ashore and met on the dock to talk things over.

"You boys certainly have the closest finishes I've ever seen," exclaimed Mr. Maxwell. "You don't try to fix them that way, do you?"

"Not if we can help it, I tell you," said Thomas laughingly. "I thought we were going to win this last race."

"So did we," exclaimed Grant. "You would have won, too, if it hadn't been for George here. At least that's what he says, anyway."

"What did he do?" inquired Mr. Maxwell curiously.

"I scratched the mast," said George.

"'Scratched the mast'!" exclaimed Mr. Maxwell. "Why did you do that?"

"To bring us more wind."

"You must be superstitious," laughed Mr. Maxwell.

"Well," said George, "I never used to be, but I am sort of that way now; it worked so beautifully."

"Where did you ever hear of such a thing?"

"I read about it in some book and as things looked pretty desperate for us I thought I'd try it."

"You mean to say that all you have to do when you want a breeze is to go up and scratch the mast?"

"Oh, I don't think it would work every time," laughed George. "I guess it will give you help only when you need it very badly. If you tried it all the time I suppose you'd soon wear out the charm."

"Well, you won, anyway," said Mr. Maxwell laughingly. "That makes you all tied with four and a half points for each team. The swimming race will have to decide it."

"Is every one ready for that now?" asked Grant.

"The red team is ready for anything," laughed Thomas.

"All right," said Mr. Maxwell. "The race will start just as soon as possible and remember that the points will be decided, three for first, two for second, and one for third this time."

CHAPTER XXII

A STRANGE PERFORMANCE

A COURSE had been measured one hundred and seventy-five yards in length. The start was from a large rock that stood out of the water some fifteen yards off shore and the finish was at the dock.

The contestants made their way to the starting point by way of the shore; at least they walked until they came to a spot directly opposite the big rock and then waded out as far as possible, swimming the last few yards. Before many moments had elapsed the eight boys were lined up in a row waiting for the signal. Mr. Maxwell stood on the dock, a pistol in his hand.

"We're counting on you, Grant," John had said as they walked along the shore. "You've simply got to win."

"Suppose I do," said Grant. "That'll mean three points for us and unless we take one of the

other places, too, that'll give the red team three points. If that happens the meet will end in a tie."

"Maybe George can get a place. He's not a bad swimmer, you know."

"I know he isn't, but you're just as good yourself."

"The trouble is we've never seen these other fellows swim and we have no idea whether they're any good or not."

"Well, if we do our best we shan't have any reason to kick, I guess," laughed Grant.

He was far and away the best swimmer of the four Go Ahead boys, and so often had he proved his superiority over them that it was now taken for granted. He was the only one who had mastered the crawl stroke. He knew it so well that it was almost second nature to him now, but to his three companions it still remained a mystery. That it is not an easy thing to acquire will be vouched for by any one who has attempted it. Fred was a wretched swimmer and knew perfectly well that he stood no chance in the race; he entered merely because he did not wish to miss anything. John and George were about on a par, both of them good average performers, but nothing more.

"All ready?" shouted Mr. Maxwell through his megaphone.

"Everybody ready?" asked Thomas.

Every one said he was and Thomas waved his hand to the judge. All eyes were fixed upon the figure standing on the dock, his right arm upraised with the pistol in his hand.

They had not long to wait. A flash and then the sharp report of the revolver, and almost together eight gleaming white bodies hit the water. Fred was the one exception; his position had been next to George and when the signal for the start was given he had been a trifle slow in diving.

A mad scramble ensued the moment all the contestants were in the water together and there was much splashing and confusion. Fred was behind the others and consequently bore the brunt of the whole mixup. He had not taken two strokes when George, who was ahead of him, struck him violently in the stomach with his foot.

It was a powerful blow and well nigh knocked all the wind right out of Fred's body. "Ugh!" he groaned and sank from sight.

George turned in alarm to see who it was that had been on the receiving end of his effort and was just in time to see Fred reappear puffing and

gasping. This sight seemed to tickle George immensely and he began to laugh. Fred choked and gargled and wheezed and try as he would, George could not control his laughter.

Meanwhile the other six contestants were far ahead and one glance convinced George that he and Fred were hopelessly out of the race.

"What's the matter with you?" exclaimed Fred angrily.

"I didn't mean to kick you," said George, and once more he burst into loud and uncontrollable laughter.

"I'm not talking about that," cried Fred even more aroused by the spectacle of his friend's mirth. "Why did you drop out of the race?"

"I got laughing so when I saw your face that I forgot all about the race and everything else. I never saw such a funny sight in all my life."

"Huh," snorted Fred. "You're a nice one. We'll probably lose the meet on account of you."

"I couldn't help it," cried George, and once more he began to laugh. "I just started laughing and I couldn't stop."

"Come ashore before you drown, you idiot!" exclaimed Fred, and side by side they made their way to land.

The other contestants were now strung out in a long line. Grant was easily in the lead and it seemed a foregone conclusion that he would win the race. Like some great fish he plowed through the water. His feet worked fast and evenly while his hands reached out with a great sweep and drove him speedily along. His face was under water most of the time; every few strokes he rolled over on one side, sucked in a great mouthful of air and then continued as before.

The real race was for second place and there were three in it. Hugh, Thomas, and John went along almost abreast. John could see that Grant would win the race easily enough, but he realized that in order to win the meet it was necessary for him to finish at least third. He was a good swimmer but was not a racer. Many times he had covered long distances in the water but had paid scant attention to developing his speed.

He used a powerful overhand stroke and when he was moving slowly he was practically tireless. He now was worried, however. He did not dare look around to see where George was for fear he might lose a few precious inches. He did not expect to see Fred, for he knew that his small comrade was a very poor swimmer. He had consid-

ered himself and George about on a par and he wondered how it could have happened that he had outdistanced him so far. Had he known the truth undoubtedly he would have been just as angry as Fred had been and his speed certainly would not have been benefited as a result.

Ahead of him he saw Grant and ahead of Grant he spied the dock and Mr. Maxwell standing on it waiting. It seemed very far away. Beside him swam Hugh and Thomas, one on his right and the other on his left. They were breathing hard and splashing heavily, but still they did not seem to be slowing up.

John put forth every effort. He too was becoming short of wind and his arms and legs began to feel the strain. It had been a hard day and this last contest was a severe test for all the boys.

"I must beat one of them! I must! I must!" John kept saying to himself over and over again. Then the next time he saw his rivals Thomas was several feet ahead of him and gaining.

John groaned. Hugh still kept abreast of him and try as hard as he could John seemed powerless to shake him off. He gritted his teeth and strove desperately to make his arms go still faster. Nature could not be forced however; his arms

seemed made of lead and every time he raised them he wondered if it would not be the last.

Far ahead he saw Grant only a few feet from the dock. Thomas, too, was many yards in advance of him now. "I simply can't keep it up any longer," thought John, and the next instant, "Don't quit," he told himself, and he forced his tired muscles to carry him along a few strokes more. He set his jaw determinedly and decided he'd keep it up till he reached the dock no matter what happened later.

Suddenly an idea struck him. " Perhaps Hugh is just as tired as I am," he thought. "In that case all I have to do is to keep on swimming at a moderate pace and I'll beat him."

Hugh was certainly splashing more than he had been and evidently was in trouble. "I'll get him yet," thought John and for a moment he felt stronger. "I've forgotten the others though," he suddenly realized and the fear that some one would creep past him before the finish assailed him all at once. He decided to roll over on his back and look.

He did so and behind him he saw only two swimmers. They were not near enough to be dangerous however and John did not even recognize them.

That two of the contestants were missing he did not notice at all.

Often when swimming long distances he had turned over up on his back in order to rest and now he was surprised to find how even a few strokes in that position relieved his aching muscles. The finish was close at hand now, however, and he dared not continue in that fashion any longer. He rolled over and resumed his overhand stroke.

Grant was already on the dock standing beside Mr. Maxwell. Thomas had just reached the goal and was pulling himself up out of the water. To his surprise John noticed that in spite of the fact that he had been swimming on his back Hugh had not gained anything on him. His brief rest had refreshed him considerably and with added confidence he struck out for the finish. Without really noticing it he was aware that Hugh was floundering more than ever. He did not turn to look, however, but concentrated every effort on his swimming, and still struggled on towards the goal.

He lost sight of Hugh; he saw nothing but the dock ahead of him. His lungs cried for mercy and his muscles ached, but vigorously he still kept going. After what seemed centuries he reached the dock, not knowing whether he had beaten Hugh out

or not. In fact he did not care much now. He had gained the dock at last and he was happy.

He raised his eyes to look about him and what he saw was very strange indeed. Mr. Maxwell, standing fully clothed on the dock, suddenly dove right over his head into the water.

CHAPTER XXIII

AN UNEXPECTED HONOR

TIRED as he was John realized that this was strange proceeding. He tried to pull himself up on the dock, but he was too weak and slipped back into the water.

"Grant," he called, "give me a lift."

"Come ahead," cried Grant, bending over and extending his hand to John.

With this help the tired boy lifted himself out of the water and sank down on the dock almost completely exhausted. He lay flat on his back, his eyes closed.

"Where's Hugh?" he panted. "Did I beat him?"

There was no answer.

"Grant," said John. "Did I beat Hugh?"

Still no reply, and he opened his eyes to see what the reason for the silence was. He slowly raised himself to one elbow and looked about him. Black spots danced before his eyes and at first he saw

nothing; then his eyes suddenly became accustomed to the surroundings and he gasped. For the moment he had forgotten that he had seen Mr. Maxwell jump into the water but he remembered it now and he saw the reason for it.

Grant had finished the race and not greatly tired had been standing alongside Mr. Maxwell watching the others approach. The race between John and Hugh was what interested them most for they saw that Thomas would finish an easy second and so the final outcome of the meet depended on these two.

"A pretty tight race," remarked Grant.

"I should—" began Mr. Maxwell when he suddenly stopped and stared.

John had just turned over on his stomach again for the final dash. Hugh was at his shoulder and the onlookers were enjoying the close finish. Suddenly, however, Hugh disappeared from sight. He simply sank beneath the water with no warning whatsoever and John reached the dock alone.

"He's exhausted," cried Mr. Maxwell, and without waiting an instant he dived into the water, fully clothed as he was, to rescue his nephew.

When John opened his eyes he saw Mr. Maxwell in the water, swimming for the dock with one hand

and holding Hugh by the hair of his head with the other.

"What's the trouble, Grant?" demanded John.

"Hugh sank."

"What was the matter with him?"

"He was tired out, I guess. Here, let me have him now," he said to Mr. Maxwell and leaning out from the dock he seized Hugh by the arms. His uncle gave the half-drowned boy a boost and he was soon stretched out at full length on the little wharf.

"That was a close call," exclaimed Mr. Maxwell grimly as he clambered out after him. "It's a lucky thing he was so near the dock. Where are the rest of the boys?"

"Here are two of them," said Grant as Franklin and Herbert swam leisurely up to the dock. Seeing that they were hopelessly beaten they had not exerted themselves the last seventy-five yards of the race.

"Where are the other two?" exclaimed John anxiously. He had recovered most of his breath and strength now and not seeing George or Fred was fearful lest the fate that Hugh had so narrowly escaped had befallen them.

"Turn around and you'll see."

George and Fred came walking towards the dock.

"Where did you two come from?" demanded John in surprise. "The last I saw of you was when we all dived off that rock together. How did you get up on shore that way?"

"Have you ever been kicked by a mule?" asked Fred.

"What are you talking about?" John was completely mystified.

"I asked if you'd ever been kicked by a mule."

"What has that got to do with this race?"

"Simply this," said Fred. "A mule kicked me in the stomach at the start of the race and I had to quit."

"I think you're crazy," exclaimed John. "What happened to you, Pop?"

"He was the mule," said Fred. "Who won the race anyway?"

"Tell us what you're talking about first," said John, beginning to get a little bit angry. "Stop talking in riddles."

Fred explained how his stomach had come in contact with George's foot and how, as a result, they had both been compelled to give up the race.

The tale provided much amusement to the listeners and even Hugh, who had partly revived, joined in the laughter.

"I'm no mule though," insisted George.

"You've got a kick like one just the same," laughed Fred. "Tell me," he continued, "who won the race."

"Grant won," replied Mr. Maxwell.

"Good work, Grant," cried Fred. "Who was second?"

"Thomas."

"When you tell me who was third you'll also tell me whether we won the meet or not. Who was it?"

"John was third," said Grant.

"John?" exclaimed George in mock surprise. "It can't be possible."

"Don't get so fresh," said John and he gave George a violent push which sent him flying off the end of the wharf into the water.

"Serves him right," said Fred approvingly. "He's very much too fresh."

George came to the surface, gasping and choking.

"Congratulations, String," he cried as soon as

he had shaken the water out of his eyes. "Glad you got a place; I thought you would."

"You can't keep that fellow down," laughed Fred. "There's no use in trying. He's fresh and he knows it, but no matter what you do to him he keeps it up just the same."

"He's not fresh," laughed Mr. Maxwell. "He's just full of spirits."

"I don't know what we'd do without him anyway," said Grant feelingly. "There are not many dull moments when Pop is around."

"I would suggest," said Mr. Maxwell, "that you boys go and put your clothes on. The sun is beginning to go down and it'll be cold soon."

"I'm cold now," exclaimed John. "I'm going to get my clothes all right."

He hurried off towards the tent closely followed by the seven other boys. A brisk rub down with heavy towels soon got their blood to circulating once more and no one felt any ill effects from all their exercises and exertion of the day.

"Now I shall present the prizes," said Mr. Maxwell when the boys were assembled in front of the tent. "The blue team wins the meet by the margin of eight points to six. I congratulate

them and take great pleasure in presenting to them the big American flag. They all know how I feel about it and I expect them to treat it as it should be treated."

"Three cheers for the blue team," cried Thomas lustily and they were given with a will, as Grant stepped forward to receive the trophy.

"And now the second prize," said Mr. Maxwell. "It's not as big as the first but the size doesn't count. Everything depends on whether our hearts are with the flag or not. If I should happen to come back to this lake unexpectedly any time this summer I shall expect to see both these flags flying in front of their respective tents."

"We'll promise that all right," said Thomas readily, and as he took the emblem from Mr. Maxwell's hand, Grant led a cheer for the red team.

"One more prize," continued Mr. Maxwell. "I brought something which I decided should go to the boy who in my judgment gave the best individual performance. That is who in any one event showed the most nerve and grit. Perhaps he didn't win the event but he worked hardest and that is what to my mind deserves the credit."

He produced a large four-bladed pocket knife

and held it up for the eight boys to see. This was a surprise to them all and they looked at one another in amazement. They also cast many envious glances at the knife which was certainly a beauty and one of which any boy could well be proud.

"It was an awful job deciding," said Mr. Maxwell. "Every one did so well I was almost in despair as to whom to give it to. I have finally decided, however, and I feel sure you'll all think the boy deserves it."

Not one of the boys had the least idea who was to become the fortunate owner of the knife and in keen suspense they all waited.

"I will now ask the winner to step forward," continued Mr. Maxwell. "I watched him closely in the contest which I think entitles him to the prize and I don't remember ever having seen a finer exhibition of pluck. I know just how tired he was and how much nerve he required to keep himself going. He didn't win the race himself but he did win the meet for his team and I think he should have the credit. John, here is your knife. That was a great race you swam a few minutes ago."

John was completely taken by surprise. He

had not for a moment expected that he was to be the fortunate one and he was almost overcome.

"Yea, String!" shouted George heartily. "Let's give the old thin fellow three cheers."

Congratulations were in order and there was much laughter and fun. Every one was in excellent spirits and all pronounced the meet a decided success. The day was fast waning now and the party of visitors prepared to leave the island for their camp at the other end of the land. The four Go Ahead boys escorted them to their boat and good-bys were said. Promises that the eight boys would see one another soon were made and the *Spruce* weighed anchor and glided out of the little harbor.

"Well," exclaimed Grant when their guests had gone, "I think we had a pretty fine time to-day."

"We certainly did," agreed Fred. "What we want now is a pole for our flag. It ought to be set right up in front of the tent there."

"I'll get the ax right now and we'll go and cut one," said George. "Come along, Fred.

CHAPTER XXIV

IN QUEST OF GAME

THE days and weeks slipped by and still the life in the island camp did not pall on on the four Go Ahead boys. They were busy every moment with the thousand and one duties and pleasures of camp life and the summer days drifted by like a succession of pleasant dreams.

One of the boys' favorite occupations was shooting at a target. Fred was the owner of a little twenty-two caliber, hammerless rifle, and many an hour was spent by the boys in practice with this small gun. It was surprising how skillful they had become.

Grant and John were lying on the wharf one afternoon trying to shoot the heads off some water lilies that grew near the shore on the opposite side of the harbor.

"Now just suppose that one was an Indian," exclaimed John, taking careful aim at an unsuspect-

ing lily bud. The sharp spit of the little rifle followed and the bullet struck the water some two feet the other side of the "Indian."

"You'll have to do better than that," laughed Grant. "We'll all be scalped in a minute unless you get him. Let me try."

John passed over the gun and on his first attempt Grant split the bulb clearly in halves.

"Good shot, Grant," exclaimed John. "You saved our lives."

"Just suppose that had been a lion or a tiger or a rhinoceros or some animal like that charging down upon us," said Grant. "Suppose we were caught in a little ravine and we either had to kill the animal or be killed ourselves. What would you do?"

"I'd probably be so scared I'd faint or something," laughed John.

"It would take nerve all right, wouldn't it?"

"More than I've got, I'm afraid."

"Oh, I don't know. I think most people are brave when it comes right down to the point."

"I hope I'd be, anyway," exclaimed John. "I think a coward is about the worst thing in the world."

"Some people that seem the most timid have the

most nerve when it's really needed," remarked Grant. "The ones that talk the loudest are not always the bravest by a long shot."

"Perhaps they try to make up by noise what they lack in nerve," laughed John. "I've noticed that too, and I've also discovered that it doesn't pay to make fun of anybody. Do you remember that boy at home? Everybody used to call him a 'sis' and a 'willie-boy' but when Bob Jackson's dog fell into the mill-race he was the only one who had nerve enough to jump in after him. That taught me a lesson, I can tell you."

"I wonder what animal is the most dangerous in the world."

"A lion is, I guess."

"I don't think so. Lions are mostly scavengers they say and I've heard that tigers are worse than they are. A tiger doesn't give any warning at all when he attacks."

"Well, I'd just as soon not meet either one of them on a lonely road," laughed John.

"Nor I," agreed Grant. "I've heard though that a rhinoceros or an African buffalo is worse than either a lion or a tiger."

"How about a grizzly bear?"

"They're all pretty bad, I guess," said Grant.

"I wouldn't stop to argue with any one of them."

"Let me have that gun again," exclaimed John. "If we're going to meet all these ferocious wild animals we'll need more practice in shooting."

Just at this moment, however, George and Fred appeared. They came out of the clump of trees behind the tent and seemed very much excited about something.

"Hey, Grant!" called Fred. "Where's the gun?"

"Right here. What's the matter?"

"Do you remember what you said about wanting to shoot one of those big herons and have it stuffed?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Well, Pop and I discovered one just now in that little marsh over on the other side of the island."

"Bring the gun along and maybe you'll get a shot at it," exclaimed George. "You'd better hurry though."

"He won't be there now," said Grant.

"Why won't he?" demanded Fred. "You won't get him if you sit there and do nothing, like a great big galoot though. Let me have the gun if you don't want it yourself."

"Oh, I'll go with you," exclaimed Grant rising to his feet. "I don't think for a minute he'll still be there though. What was he doing?"

"Looking for fish, I guess," said George. "He was wading around in the swamp on those great long legs of his; he looked as if he was on stilts."

"Grant doesn't seem very eager, Pop," remarked Fred. "I wish he'd give us the gun."

"Come along," cried Grant. "I've been waiting for you to start."

"Huh," snorted Fred; "listen to that. I think we ought to have the bird anyway; we discovered him."

"Did he see you?" asked John. The four boys were now hurrying along guided by Fred who was slightly in the lead.

"I can truthfully say that he did not," said George decidedly and Fred snickered.

"What's the matter?" inquired Grant suspiciously. "What are you laughing at?"

"Nothing," said Fred quickly, but as he looked back at his companions the suspicion of a smile lurked upon his countenance.

"There's something funny about this," exclaimed Grant. "I tell you right now that if you

two are putting up a game on me there'll be trouble."

"I don't believe they saw a heron at all," said John.

"I tell you we did," exclaimed Fred earnestly. "Pop and I will both swear to it; we saw one in the swamp over here. Of course we can't guarantee that he'll still be there when you slow pokes arrive."

"That's right," chimed in George. "We certainly did see one not five minutes before we came back to the dock to tell you about it. I don't see why you need be so suspicious about it."

"Well, I wouldn't trust you two," said Grant. "You've acted sort of funny about it too."

"You only think we have," retorted Fred. "Careful now, the marsh is just ahead of us."

"Why don't we sneak up behind those bushes?" suggested George, pointing to a clump of elderberries a few yards in front of them.

"That's a good scheme," exclaimed Fred. "We can hide behind them and get a good view of the marsh without being seen ourselves."

Stealthily the four boys made their way until they reached the spot George had designated. On the other side of the bushes and extending for

a hundred yards or so was the swamp where the heron was reported to have been seen.

"Careful now," whispered Fred as they crouched behind the clump of elderberry bushes. "We don't want to scare him away."

"If he's still there," muttered Grant. He had been suspicious of Fred and George; their manner had seemed somewhat peculiar to him but they were serious enough now and his doubts were removed.

"Do you see him?" asked John eagerly, as Fred peered out through an opening in the bushes.

"Not yet."

"Where was he when you saw him before?" demanded Grant.

"Down by that point. I don't see him there now though."

"Let me look," pleaded Grant excitedly. "I haven't seen him yet."

"Look along the shore," directed Fred, yielding his place to Grant. "He's more likely to be there than any place else I think."

As Grant searched the marsh George suddenly made a peculiar noise. It might have passed for a sob or a chuckle or he could have even been accused of choking.

"Stop that," cried Fred fiercely, hitting George sharply in the ribs with his fist.

"What's the matter with you two?" exclaimed Grant. He turned quickly around and eyed his two companions narrowly.

"I choked," stammered George. "I couldn't help it."

"If you've been fooling me you'll do worse than choke," muttered Grant fiercely. "You two are acting very queerly it seems to me."

"Because I choked?" demanded George. "I don't see what there is queer about that."

"Will you swear you saw a heron here?" demanded Grant.

"I will," exclaimed Fred. "I declare to you, Grant, there was one here. We saw him first down by that point where I showed you."

"He's not there now," said Grant. "That much is sure."

"He may have moved along you know. Just because he isn't in that same spot doesn't mean that he has left."

"Well, I don't see him anyway."

"Let me look," exclaimed George. "My eyes are better than yours."

Grant exchanged places with George who now

seemed to have recovered from his recent affliction; he scanned the nearby marsh eagerly and was quiet and serious now.

"Well?" demanded Grant after a moment had elapsed.

George turned and looked at the speaker. "Come here," he whispered, crooking his finger mysteriously.

Grant, much excited now, crowded up close beside George. Together they peered out across the swamp.

"See that dead log lying on the beach down there?" inquired George.

"Yes."

"Do you see anything the other side of it?"

"No."

"Not a thing?"

"I don't see anything but the old dead limb of a tree sticking up."

"That's not a dead limb, Grant."

"Sure enough," cried Grant excitedly. "Say," he exclaimed, "I saw that thing before but I thought it was a stick."

"It's not though," said George triumphantly. "It's a heron and Fred and I accept your apology for all you've thought about us."

"Why doesn't it move?" demanded Grant.

"Don't you know that herons often stand like that for a long, long time? If you're going to shoot that fellow you'd better get a move on yourself though."

"I can't hit him from here."

"Don't try. Sneak up closer."

"Give me the gun, Grant," exclaimed Fred. "If you don't care anything about shooting him I'd like a try at it myself."

"No, you don't," said Grant quickly, and rising to his feet he crouched low and began to run swiftly down towards the shore of the lake.

"Follow those bushes along the shore," directed George. "Don't let him see you, whatever you do."

"He's all right so far," said Fred. "He's got good protection down as far as the water anyway."

"I hope he gets it," exclaimed John eagerly. "He's certainly a good shot and that ought to help some."

"Oh, he'll get it all right," said George. He and Fred looked at each other for a moment and then both burst into silent but uncontrollable laughter.

"What's the matter with you two?" demanded

John, completely taken aback by their strange behavior.

"Oh, String," said George. "If you only knew."

"Well, why don't you tell me?" exclaimed John. "What sort of a game have you put up on Grant anyway?"

"Do you see that heron he's after?"

"Yes, of course I do."

"Well, it's dead. Fred and I found it on the shore and stuck it up behind that log. Just wait till Grant finds it out," and the two conspirators hugged each other delightedly.

CHAPTER XXV

THE WORM TURNS

MEANWHILE Grant was stalking his game. He crouched low and making as much speed as was consistent with quietness, he hurried along.

"Just look at him!" cried George ecstatically, as now and again the hunter could be seen to stop and peer cautiously in the direction of his prey.

"I should think the fact that it hasn't moved would make him suspicious," remarked John.

"He thinks herons always act that way," chuckled Fred. "I can hardly wait for him to shoot."

"You fellows nearly queered your whole game a couple of times all right," said John. "We were both suspicious of you. Why, twice you had grins on your faces so long you could almost pin them in the back."

"It was so funny," laughed George. "To think how we planned the whole thing and how easily he fell into it. Why, it was almost too easy."

"Don't be too sure," warned John. "He hasn't fired yet, you know."

"He will all right," said Fred confidently. "The old bird has been dead for about a month and you just ought to smell it."

"Won't he be mad?" exclaimed George. This thought seemed to give him special pleasure.

"He'll probably shoot us," laughed Fred.

"Where is he now?" inquired John. "I don't see him."

"He's down behind that rock," said George. "There he comes."

"He'd better shoot pretty soon," chuckled Fred. "The bird will fly away if he isn't careful."

"Isn't this rich?" exclaimed George. "Just think of putting up a game on Grant like this."

"Look at him!" cried Fred. "He's almost on his hands and knees now."

"Shoot, Grant, shoot!" urged George.

Nearer and nearer to the heron Grant crept. He had his gun half raised as he stole along, prepared to shoot at any moment. His three companions intently watched him, thoroughly enjoying the whole affair.

"If he doesn't shoot pretty soon he'll see that it's dead," said John.

"He's trying to get up behind that bush, I think," said George.

"He's taking a chance," laughed Fred. "The heron will see him and fly away if he isn't more careful."

"There he goes!" exclaimed George. "He's going to shoot."

"And now for the fun," cried Fred. "Won't he be mad though?"

Grant stopped and sinking to one knee he raised the little rifle to his shoulder.

"Don't miss him, Grant," chuckled Fred.

The gun spoke, and a moment later the faint report came to the ears of the three boys who watched from behind the elderberry bushes.

"Did he hit him?" laughed George. "What's he doing?"

Grant had jumped to his feet after the first shot and started to run along the shore. He came to the log where the dead heron had been propped up but he did not stop there. He continued on past this spot and the conspirators for the first time had an inkling that all was not going as they had hoped.

"What's happened?" demanded John in surprise. "What's he after?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Fred blankly.

Some fifty or sixty feet beyond the spot where the dead log lay Grant continued. Not one of his friends had been looking at this place for their attention had been riveted on the dead heron.

The grass grew level with Grant's knees where he was now. He leaned over and seemed to be looking down at something on the ground at his feet.

"What do you suppose it is?" demanded George curiously.

"Look," exclaimed John and as he spoke Grant lifted from the grass a great blue heron. He held it by the feet and turning towards the bush where his companions were he waved his gun. Then he slung the big bird over his shoulder and started to retrace his steps.

George, Fred, and John had watched these proceedings in open-mouthed amazement.

"Well, what do you know about that?" exclaimed George limply.

"I guess he's got us all right," sighed Fred. "Let's skip back to camp before he gets hold of us."

"We'd better stay and face the music," said George with a sigh. "Doesn't that beat all?

Just when we thought we had him good and fooled, he turns around and puts the joke on us."

"I don't see yet what happened," exclaimed John.

"Why, he saw another heron, that's all," said Fred. "It was a live one too, I guess."

"Where's the one you and Pop fixed up for him?"

"Still there behind the log."

"Grant never even looked at it," said George. "He'll make our lives miserable all the rest of the summer."

"It's almost over now," said Fred. "He can't tease us long."

In silence the three boys sat and watched their comrade approach. John did not dread the meeting so much, for he had not been one of the original conspirators, but Fred and George looked forward to Grant's arrival with anything but pleasure.

"What do you think of him?" cried Grant as he held up his prize for his friends to see. "Isn't he a beauty?"

"He's all right," said George weakly.

"What's the matter, Pop?" demanded Grant. "You don't seem very enthusiastic. Don't you like his looks?"

"He's fine," replied George in a hollow voice.

"Where did you find him?" demanded Fred bluntly.

"Right where I shot him," said Grant. "You saw the spot where I picked him up, didn't you?"

"We saw it all right," said Fred grimly. "We haven't a word to say either. You have the joke on us all right, Grant. All I ask is that you don't rub it in too much."

"I won't," laughed Grant. "It was awfully funny the way it turned out. I never suspected at first that the heron you pointed out to me was dead. I kept sneaking up as close as I dared and the thing never moved a bit and it began to strike me as sort of queer. Then I remembered how you fellows had snickered a couple of times and I felt pretty sure that something was wrong.

"All of a sudden I saw this bird just a few yards beyond the log. I knew then that my chance had come to turn the joke on you, but I was so anxious my arm was shaking like a leaf. I was afraid I surely would miss and when I saw that I hadn't, I can tell you I felt pretty good. Here's the heron and if you two fellows want yours you'll find him down by that log. He smells a little strong though."

"Let's go back to camp," exclaimed George.

"All right," laughed Grant. "As long as you don't like the subject, I won't say too much about it."

Laughing and joking they made their way back towards their camp. George and Fred realized how badly they had fared in their attempt to play a practical joke, but they were good sports and consequently good losers. They joined in the fun at their own expense, and were unstinted in their praise of the prize Grant had gained.

"We certainly got more than we were looking for that time," said George laughingly. "You are—"

He suddenly ceased speaking and gazed in surprise in the direction of the tent.

"What's the matter?" demanded John anxiously.

"Some man with a big black beard just ran around the other side of the tent," exclaimed George.

CHAPTER XXVI

AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER

"ARE you sure you saw a man?" asked Grant skeptically.

"I know I did," replied George with the utmost conviction.

"What did he look like?"

"He looked like a tramp; a rough looking sort of a fellow with a black beard and an old slouch hat."

"Only one man?"

"That's all I saw."

"What shall we do?" demanded Fred blankly.

"We'll go down and see what he wants," said George in a matter of fact tone. "What else is there to do?"

"Suppose he's looking for trouble?" suggested Fred.

"Well then, he'll find it," said George grimly. "There are four of us to his one."

"He may not be alone," said Fred. "I think we'd better go slow."

"Grant has a gun."

"But he's not going to use it," said Grant quickly. "You don't catch me shooting at anybody, tramp or no tramp. I don't want any blood on my head."

"Suppose they attack us?" demanded George.

"'They,'" exclaimed Grant. "I thought you said you saw only one."

"That's all I did see. There may be more of them though."

"Probably a couple of guides," said John. "Let's go find out anyway."

"I'd be careful," warned Fred. "There's no use in taking chances."

"What's the matter with you, Fred?" demanded George. "What are you so nervous about?"

"I don't know. It seems funny to me though that a man like that should be hanging around our tent."

"He's probably waiting for us to come back."

"Then why did he duck behind the tent the minute he saw us?"

"Maybe he didn't see us at all."

"The thing to do is to go down there and find out," exclaimed Grant. "Come on, Pop, you and I will go anyway."

"And so will I," added John.

"I'll go myself," said Fred. "I'm not afraid; all I said was that I thought we ought to be careful."

"We'll be careful," George assured him. "Come along."

The little band once again started towards the tent. As Fred had remarked it seemed a strange thing that any man like the one George had seen should be loitering around their camp. They had had no visitors that summer aside from their opponents in the water sports and Mr. Maxwell, and the appearance of a stranger on the island was unusual enough to cause them some alarm.

Side by side they walked towards the spot where their tent was pitched. No further sign of their visitor appeared and this in itself made the four boys somewhat uneasy.

"Where did he go, do you suppose?" whispered John.

"Are you sure you saw a man, Pop?" demanded Grant.

"Of course I did. Do you think I'm crazy?"

"Where is he then? No one else saw him."

George made no reply to this remark and in complete silence they continued on their way. At

length they came to the tent itself but no one was to be seen. They peered inside, but it was empty of any living person. Grant turned to George triumphantly.

"You're seeing things to-day," he laughed. He laid the heron on the ground in front of the tent and placed his gun inside.

"I saw a man," insisted George.

"And you tried to make me see a live heron that was dead," said Grant.

"It's certainly strange," muttered George. "I know I saw a man. I'd take my dying oath on it."

"But where is he?" demanded Grant.

"That's just what I say," rejoined George. "Where is he?"

"He doesn't seem to be—" began John, when he suddenly stopped. "Look," he cried and pointed towards the shore.

Two men were seated under a small tree which grew half-way between the wharf and the tent. Their backs were towards the boys so that it was impossible to see who they were. The back view however was not very reassuring. The strangers appeared to be rough and unkempt and were busily engaged in eating some food they had evidently helped themselves to from the stores of the four

young campers. Both men seemed entirely unaware that they were being watched.

"How did they get there without our seeing them?" whispered John. "Pop saw one of them up by the tent."

"The tent is between that tree and the place where we were standing," said George. "It shut off our view and they probably walked down there while we were coming towards the tent."

"What shall we do?" whispered Fred.

"Yell at them," suggested John.

"Don't you do it," cautioned Grant quickly.

"For goodness' sake," exclaimed George suddenly in a low voice. "Don't any one of you fellows move," he ordered them. "Just wait here for me."

He turned and darted quickly inside the tent while his three companions were completely mystified by his strange behavior. They gazed after him in amazement.

"What's he after?" asked John in a whisper.

"Maybe he went for the gun," suggested Fred.

"I wonder if he did," exclaimed Grant. "We mustn't have that," and he started to follow George inside the tent.

Just as he was about to lift the flap and enter,

however, George suddenly appeared. He held one of the young campers' big balsam pillows in each hand and he wore a queer expression on his face. His three friends looked at him in amazement not unmixed with alarm.

"What are you going to do?" demanded Grant.

"Ssh!" hissed George. "Watch me."

He cautiously stole forward in the direction of the two men. His companions were too surprised to make any effort to restrain him. Open-mouthed they stood and watched him stealthily approach the tree underneath which the two rough-looking men were seated.

CHAPTER XXVII

CONCLUSION

"HE'S gone crazy," muttered Grant. "We should have held him back."

On tip-toe and evidently trying to make as little noise as possible, George stole forward. Nearer and nearer he approached, the pillows still held firmly in his hands. He slackened his pace as he came closer and redoubled his efforts to move cautiously.

"They'll turn and see him in a second," whispered Fred, as much to himself as to anybody else. All three of the boys were tense with excitement as they riveted their attention on their companion who to them was doing such a remarkable thing.

George was scarcely ten feet distant from the men now. All at once he stopped. He slowly drew back his right arm and taking careful aim he let fly the pillow which he held. True to its mark it sped. It struck the larger of the two men

squarely in the neck. The second pillow followed the other an instant later and it too scored a hit. Both had been aimed at the same man.

No sooner had George completed his bombardment than he uttered a wild whoop and rushed forward. He dashed straight towards the man he had been so successful in hitting and threw both arms around him.

Grant, Fred, and John were too taken aback to do more than stand and gaze stupidly at the strange proceedings taking place before their eyes. George's actions to them were a complete mystery.

Suddenly he ceased hugging the rough looking man he had pounced upon so eagerly and turned to his three camp-mates.

"Grant!" he cried. "John! Fred! Come here and see who this is."

"Who is it?" exclaimed John blankly. "Thomas and Hugh?"

"Here's your father, Fred," called George loudly. "Don't you want to see him?"

Fred started violently at these words. He stared ahead of him and then suddenly gave vent to a wild shriek.

"Dad!" he cried and rushing pell mell down the

gradual incline he threw himself upon the smaller of the two "tramps."

"Why it's Mr. Button and Mr. Sanders," exclaimed Grant in surprise. "Where do you suppose they came from?"

"All dressed up to look like tramps," added John. "What do you suppose they are trying to do?"

"Play a joke on us, I guess," laughed Grant. "Let's go down and see them."

They soon joined the little group gathered underneath the tree and a happy gathering it was.

"What do you think of these two tramps, Grant?" inquired George when greetings had been exchanged all around.

"What do you think of a boy who would hit his poor old father in the back of the neck with two big pillows?" laughed Mr. Sanders. "That strikes me as pretty rough treatment."

"It surely is," agreed Grant. "We usually take him down and duck him when he gets fresh that way."

"I'm afraid I can't do that," said Mr. Sanders sorrowfully. "He has gotten so husky this summer I'd hate to tackle him now."

"We didn't know you were coming up here,"

said Fred, addressing his father and Mr. Sanders.

"And we didn't want you to know it either," laughed Mr. Button. "We planned a surprise for you."

"You gave it to us all right," said John grimly. "We were sure you were two thugs of some kind who had come up here to rob us."

"How do you like our costumes?" demanded Mr. Sanders jovially. "Do we really look like a couple of desperate characters?"

"You certainly do, Dad," said George. "I never saw worse."

"How did you dare to throw those big heavy pillows at me then?"

"I recognized you right away, even from the back. You need a pretty good disguise to fool your son you know."

"So it seems," admitted Mr. Sanders and he rubbed the back of his neck ruefully.

"Didn't you see us coming?" asked John.

"No," said Mr. Button. "We arrived here about twenty minutes ago and didn't find a soul around anywhere. So we just made ourselves at home and decided we'd have a little luncheon."

"I saw one of you duck behind the tent," said

George. "Then when we didn't see you again it sort of worried us. Imagine how we felt when we saw these two rough looking men sitting under the tree here."

"Where had you boys been?" asked Mr. Sanders.

"We went out to shoot a blue heron," said Grant. "Ask George about it; he'll be glad to tell you all the details," and he nudged John who was standing next to him.

"I was the goat all right," laughed George, and he proceeded to recount the story of how he and Fred had tried to put up a game on Grant but had had the tables turned on them.

The tale caused much merriment on the part of Mr. Button and Mr. Sanders. Curiously enough these two men happened to be the fathers of the boys who had been the victims of their own joke.

"It served them right, Grant," laughed Mr. Button. "I hate these practical jokers and am always glad to see them fooled. I notice it usually happens that way too."

The party had moved up to a spot directly in front of the tent now and all were seated in a circle on the ground. The day was waning and the sun

was beginning to sink low in the western sky. A gray haze hung over the surrounding hills and forests. A strong wind blew off the lake.

"You know that breeze is cold," exclaimed Mr. Button with a slight shiver, and he drew his coat closer about him.

"Why shouldn't it be?" demanded Mr. Sanders. "It's almost fall now and the summer is practically over."

"I know it is," exclaimed George. "I hate to think of it too."

"You've had a good time up here, have you?" inquired Mr. Button.

"Wonderful," replied all the young campers with one accord.

"You certainly look so," laughed Mr. Sanders. "You're as tanned as a lot of Indians and you look just about as wiry."

"It's been great fun," said John. "We've been out in the air all summer and on the water so much we ought to be healthy."

"We'll have to come back here again next summer," exclaimed George. "What do you say to that, Dad?"

"Personally I should think you'd rather go to

some other place next time. I like different experiences myself."

"So do I," agreed Grant. "There are so many wonderful places and things in the world that it's worth trying to visit and see all of them you can, I think."

"That suits me," exclaimed George. "What do you say, Dad? We'll go to some other place next time."

"As far as I'm concerned you may," said Mr. Sanders. "Go ahead."

THE END

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